

Chapter one

Harry potter's life was never what could be considered normal. That said, he never complained or asked for anything, he'd learned at an early age there wasn't any point. Things were the way they were and that was that, nothing was going to change it. Being allowed to die in peace though surely wasn't too much to ask? Apparently for Harry Potter it was!

Here he was, lying in a secret chamber, deep below Hogwarts, with a ruddy great basilisk fang sticking out of his arm. Surely he deserved the right to die in peace, contemplating on those who would be waiting on him while thinking of the few he would miss leaving behind.

Instead of peaceful contemplation, Harry got some evil psychopathic phantom, continually gloating over his painful and imminent demise. Harry understood life wasn't fair but it would appear death wasn't either. The poison was seriously messing with his head and this prick yapping into his face made him so mad. He yanked the bloody fang right out his own arm, ready to stab this bastard with it if he came close enough. Harry had nothing left to lose.

"You're dead Harry Potter."

Oh how he wished this prick would shut up.

"Dead. Even Dumbledore's bird knows it. Do you see what he's doing, Potter? He's crying."

Harry's sight wasn't good at the best of times, this was certainly not the best of times. By squinting he could see the tears escaping from Fawkes eyes, the funny thing was that every one of them landed directly on his bleeding wound. This fascinated Harry, well anything was better than listening to this prick's patter! What had Tom done that he had to continually boast about it? Set a Basilisk on a twelve year old boy and then stood back and watched. Oh what a powerful bloody wizard that made Tom Riddle.

"I'm going to sit here and watch you die, Harry Potter."

Sure Tom, pull up a seat! Make yourself at home. Wait, this is your home. Giant dead snake in the middle of the living room, yuk!

"Take your time, I'm in no hurry."

Actually Harry thought, neither am I. If this is dying then death needs a new press agent. He was feeling better by the minute.

"So ends the famous Harry Potter."

Hey, since I'm famous, lets sell tickets. Fred and George will organise a sweep to see when I finally kick the bucket. A galleon on a hundred and fifty years from now guys.

"Alone in the chamber of secrets."

Chance would be a fine thing. Run along now Tom, you must have something better to do?

"Forsaken by his friends."

Harry was beginning to get angry now. One's in the infirmary and another needs to get there soon, you moron. If the three of us had have been here, you wouldn't have stood a chance!

"Defeated at last by the dark lord he so unwisely challenged."

I challenged? I was fifteen months old you cretin. You came to kill a toddler and couldn't even manage that.

"You'll be back with your dear mudblood mother soon Harry."

Ok, it was now official. This guy was seriously pissing Harry off. Murdering someone was bad enough, bad mouthing their mother while they lay dying of Basilisk venom was bloody ridiculous. Bet this arsehole read nothing but bad comics as a child, this was every villain's victory speech as they proclaiming how great they were rolled into one.

"She bought you twelve years of borrowed life."

Harry was becoming distracted, he was not only feeling a lot better but would swear the wound in his arm was healing right before his eyes.

"But lord Voldemort got you in the end, as you knew he must."

All Harry knew was that he had to get his wand away from this prick. There might even be a chance to save Ginny. Oh no, he must have perked up with that thought. The idiot had broken from his monologue, he must have noticed.

"Get away from him bird, get away I say."

Fawkes flew away, his work for the moment was done.

"Phoenix tears, of course. Healing powers, I forgot."

Harry noticed he'd also forgotten about Fawkes. Now he'd left Harry, the intelligent bird was taking something from the unconscious form of Ginny.

"But it makes no difference. In fact, I prefer it this way."

You just keep talking chum, whatever Fawkes was up to he was now making his way back.

"Just you and me, Harry Potter."

Let's not forget the cleverest bird in the world, next to Hedwig of course. Harry could now see what Fawkes was bringing him, his grip tightened on the only weapon he had available.

"...You and me..."

Fawkes dropped the diary right beside Harry. Tom's face showed fear for the first time as he physically froze for a second. That was all the time the Gryffindor seeker needed. The basilisk fang was driven into the diary with every bit of strength Harry could muster. The screams from Tom were music to his ears. Pull up a seat lord Voldemort and we'll see who dies today.

Harry turned the diary over and stabbed it through the other side as well, just to make sure. An almighty scream from Tom signalled his end as he disappeared, only a magical pulse flashing through the chamber and beyond gave any indication that he'd been there.

Harry's head was splitting and he welcomed the peace and quiet. That was until he heard Ginny gasp and start to sit up. Now there was a sound he wanted to hear.

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"... and after Ginny was assured by Professor Dumbledore she wasn't going to be expelled, she finally calmed down. Poor kid, her first year in Hogwarts and that happens to you."

"Mr Potter, I know I've told you this many times before. Miss Granger can't hear you, you will have to tell her all this again when we revive her tomorrow."

They had had this conversation many times over the last three weeks, "I understand Madam Pomfrey, but some muggles who recovered from being in a coma have said they could hear people talking to them when they were unconscious. You say there is no chance of that but what if you're wrong? I would hate for her to think she was alone."

Poppy just shook her head and left him to it, she couldn't argue with that and didn't want to. She would not be chasing him out the ward tonight. He'd been here faithfully every day since the poor girl was petrified, sitting talking to her for hours at a time. It didn't matter how often she told him that Miss Granger couldn't hear what he was saying, she just left him to it.

Harry had forgotten there were two Weasleys currently in the ward. He'd spent so many hours sitting here talking to his friend that Harry had gotten used to a world that was just him and Hermione. Sure Ron would come on the odd occasion, the sight of Harry holding the petrified Hermione's hand was usually enough to see him making his excuses and leave.

He'd gradually told Hermione his entire life's history as she lay here, it was almost a relief to get some of that off his chest. He'd soon run out of things to say about schoolwork and neither Hermione nor him were very interested in gossip. With nothing else left to say, he'd begun talking about himself. She now knew more about him than anyone else in the world, he'd poured out his hopes, dreams and heart to the petrified girl.

As Madam Pomfrey left, he began telling Hermione about Lucius Malfoy, and setting Dobby free with a grubby sock.

Ginny was in a hospital bed, her mum had only left knowing her brother Ron was in the next bed to her. Ginny's heart was breaking, her hero had saved her yet thought she was a kid. She was lying here desperate for him to speak to her but, apart from the greeting when he entered, he'd spent the entire time talking to a girl petrified like stone.

Listening to the way he spoke to Hermione forced her to recognise she never stood a chance, Harry's heart already belonged to Hermione. She had tears in her eyes as she turned away, unfortunately that meant she was now facing her brother.

Ron could see her pain, "Ginny, he came for you when the famous Gilderoy Lockhart was pissing himself with fear. What more could you ask for in a friend?"

That was Ginny's problem, all that was left was the position of friend. When that friend though would fight a dark lord and a basilisk for you, what more could you ask for?

Ron almost read her mind, "Harry and Hermione are the best two friends you could ever ask for."

Ginny could only nod back her answer, she would like Harry to be more than a friend but would take anything she could get.

Harry meanwhile, had talked himself out, the adrenalin high of today had long ago left his body. All the aches and pains from his fight against the basilisk were beginning to make themselves known. He would have Hermione back tomorrow, tomorrow wasn't too far away. Harry rested his head on the bed while still holding Hermione's hand, he would just close his eyes for a minute.

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In the deepest, darkest forest of Albania, the spirit that Harry Potter had banished from Hogwarts last year reacted to a magical pulse. This spirit understood exactly what that magical pulse was, he should. It was he who invented it. Someone had just destroyed one of his horcruxes. The magical pulse was his equivalent of an S.O.S,

this would place his remaining pieces of soul on a high state of alert. They would now take any opportunity that presented itself to possess a body.

The protections he'd placed on each of them meant it would be impossible for one to be accidentally destroyed. He was barely existing but had to find the energy to return to Britain from somewhere. Only this version of himself possessed the ability to reunite the other pieces of his soul. Their sense of survival was built-in, they were part of him after all and would do whatever was needed to survive.

If someone was hunting his horcruxes then he had no other option but to return to Britain, the commands imbedded into each piece of soul were very simple. Procure a body, make their way to Riddle manor and do whatever it took to survive until he got there. He had to do the same by whatever means possible.

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Poppy saw that all her current charges were sleeping, she also noticed that she had a stowaway. Mr Potter had fallen asleep, still holding on to Miss Granger's petrified hand. The potion would be ready shortly, she'd already decided to administer it to the young girl first.

She also decided to let Mr Potter spend the night, it wouldn't be his first stay in here. Instead of waking him, Poppy began levitating the lad to an empty bed. No sooner had she begun levitating Harry when his body was gripped by some kind of seizure that saw him contorting in pain.

Poppy got him onto the bed with some difficulty before she could begin casting her diagnostic charms. Something was violently attacking the boy's body and she had no idea what it was. She called to the portrait to alert the headmaster to the emergency, she then added Minerva to the alert as well.

Albus soon came rushing into the infirmary, Minerva was close on his heels. The sight that greeted them both chilled their blood. Harry Potter was thrashing all over the bed in obvious agony, only the magical restrains Poppy had placed on the boy kept him from throwing himself clean off. Their only other clue was the trickle of

bright red blood oozing from his famous lightning bolt scar on his forehead.

"I'm glad you two are here, something is attacking Mr Potter and I have no idea what it is. He's had basilisk venom and phoenix tears introduced to his bloodstream but I don't think this is poisoning. I think whatever this is seems to be focused in his head."

Albus also cast some scans before speaking to the renowned healer, "Poppy, tell me exactly what happened. No detail is too small."

Poppy took a deep breath to focus her mind before describing the scene in as much detail as she could. "Mr Potter was as usual, sitting holding Miss Granger's hand and talking to her. I decided not to chase him tonight and he fell asleep at her bedside."

Albus interrupted, "As usual? Does he do that often?"

"Only every day since she's been here. Anyway, I was levitating him onto another bed when he began this seizure..." it was like a light switching on behind Poppy's eyes as she clearly remembered something important.

"As soon as I removed him from his contact with Miss Granger he began to convulse. What does it mean Albus? My gut feeling is that this is connected to his scar somehow."

The colour couldn't have left Dumbledore's face any quicker if his throat had been cut. Poppy and Minerva couldn't help but notice the rapid and drastic change in his complexion. The head of Gryffindor currently had five of her lions in the infirmary, one of them in so much pain he had to be tied to the bed. She was in no mood for the headmaster's platitudes tonight.

"Albus, if you know or even suspect something, then Poppy needs to know. She needs to know now!"

"Ladies, at best all I have is a suspicion."

Poppy was all over the old man like a rash, she hated feeling helpless in her own infirmary. "Headmaster, one of your students, a student who just saved the school I might add, is lying there clearly

in agony. I have no clue how to proceed, if you have anything then I need it now."

Faced with two formidable woman and Harry thrashing around on the bed, Albus had no option but to divulge one of his most closely guarded secrets. If they didn't save Harry then it didn't matter anyway.

"The diary that Mr Potter destroyed contained a piece of Voldemort's soul that he had deliberately placed there. As long as that survived, then Tom Riddle couldn't be truly banished from this world. I have long had the suspicion that Mr Potter's scar is more than that, his parseltongue abilities would appear to confirm my suspicion. I fear Voldemort inadvertently left a piece of himself behind that fateful Halloween and it's decided to make its presence known. Mr Potter is in a battle for his life. Should he lose, Voldemort could not be allowed to leave the castle."

Ron currently had his hand over his sister's mouth. Ginny was shaking with sobs as she watched Harry's face and body contort with pain but Ron didn't want them to be moved out of the infirmary. Harry's cries had woken them both but everyone appeared too busy to bother with the two Weasleys at the moment.

Ron was really worried for his best friend, it would seem that even when Harry won there was still a price to be paid. He'd battled a basilisk and the dark lord himself to save Ginny, now he could die in the infirmary. There was no mistaking what the headmaster meant by 'Voldemort couldn't be allowed to leave the castle'. If Harry didn't win this battle, it would cost him his life.

Minerva had another question for he headmaster, "Albus, why did this start when he was moved from Miss Granger? Surely that can't be coincidence?"

"Minerva, I believe the greatest weapon Harry has against Voldemort is love. Quirrell couldn't touch him last year due to the protection of Lily's love. I think that, even when asleep, the touch of Miss Granger was enough to stave off Voldemort's attack. We need to get her un-petrified as soon as possible and hope she feels the same way about Mr Potter."

Finally thought Ron, something they could do. Suddenly the two redheads were pushing past the adults and positioning themselves either side of Harry's bed. "That won't be a problem headmaster, when will the potion be ready?" both had grasped one of Harry's hands and it was plain to see the positive effect this had on him.

It was Poppy who answered, "Professor Snape expected it to be ready sometime tonight."

Ron turned his concentration back to his best friend, "Hear that Harry, Hermione will be here soon. With her back by our side we can beat anything mate. So hold on, she's coming for you."

Ginny had gotten her crying under control, Harry needed her and she owed him big time. "She'll be here soon Harry, you can beat him. You beat him as a baby, you beat him last year. You beat him again already today! Just fight with everything you've got until she gets here, that's what I did and you came for me."

Minerva left to see if she could hurry Severus along, it might now be a case of life or death.

Poppy was still trying to understand what was happening here, the diary story was known only to a select few. "Are you saying that part of the dark lord's soul is fighting Mr Potter for control of his body?"

Albus was feeling his great age tonight, "That's exactly what I'm saying Poppy, and if Mr Potter loses..."

Ron interrupted him, "Sir, Harry doesn't know how to lose. I followed him against a troll, a giant three-headed dog and into an acromantula nest, Harry got us out alive. In every case I was scared shitless but I still followed him. V..Voldemort doesn't know what he's taken on here, once Hermione is on her feet he doesn't stand a chance against the three of us."

Ginny chipped in, "The four of us Ron, the four of us!"

Albus noticed that young Mr Weasley had actually managed to say Voldemort, Mr Potter really was a born leader who inspired those around him. Both Weasleys obviously cared deeply for the boy, add in Miss Granger and Albus believed they might have a chance. The alternative was just too horrible to even contemplate.

It was undeniable that Harry's convulsions weren't as violent since both Weasleys had began holding his hands and talking to him. Poppy was making preparations so she could administer the potion to Miss Granger the instant it arrived. Albus found himself being reduced to standing there helpless while the others were busy around him, not something he was used to.

Minerva arrived with a single dose of potion, Severus had decanted it from the larger batch in order for it to cool quicker.

Poppy poured the potion through the funnel she had placed in the girl's mouth, hardly scientific but the correct result was all that mattered.

In moments colour began to return to Miss Granger's skin, indicating her blood was again flowing through her body. She lost the petrified induced rigidity as her arms and legs were once more able to relax into a more comfortable position. When her chest rose and fell with her first breath in three weeks, Hermione's eyes were suddenly searching all around her.

"Relax Miss Granger, you're in the infirmary. It will take a few moments for you to become aware of your surroundings."

Hermione shook her head at Poppy and attempted to push herself off the bed. Her lips were moving but no recognisable sounds were being formed. A small sip of water from Poppy later and Hermione was once more making sense, "Harry needs me, need to get to him."

Poppy was ready to argue she would need to wait until the effects of being petrified had totally worn off when both Weasleys helped her off the bed and laid Hermione alongside Harry, she wasn't strong enough to sit yet. She held his hand and began talking softly into his ear.

"I'm here Harry, just like you were there for me for those three weeks. I think I would have gone crazy without you talking to me. I always knew when you were near, I heard it all Harry."

Harry's body was spasming even more violently as the battle was now being fought in earnest.

"There will be no bars on your window this summer Harry, no meagre bits of food passed through a flap on your locked room door. Those Dursleys can go hang themselves if they think I'll let them near you again, you're coming home with me!"

Albus was about to object when Poppy put her hand over his mouth and Minerva dragged him away by the ear. When they were a safe distance away, Poppy quietly as she could unloaded into the headmaster. "That boy is fighting for his life and can obviously hear what's being said. You were about to make an objection that would harm his chances of survival. If Miss Granger tells him that you will appear in the great hall tomorrow as a gorilla then we will be making a monkey out of you. I've got nothing Albus, and neither have you! Right now that girl is Mr Potter's only hope."

Minerva wasn't so complementary, "Bars on windows, feeding flaps on locked doors! You try to send him back there Albus and I'll petition the ministry myself. Just because Lily was a wonderful woman doesn't automatically mean her sister will be too, and that husband of hers is a brute!"

Albus attempted to justify himself, " But the protection..."

Poppy cut him off, "... will mean nothing if he doesn't pull through this!"

The headmaster couldn't argue with that logic.

Hermione had continued talking to Harry, "I know your dreams now Harry but I can't make them come true unless you return to us. My house has plenty of rooms and we can have Ron over for part of the summer as well. I'm also dying to see the Burrow, you described it so well."

Ron joined in at this point, "You know mum would love to have you both over during the summer too. What do you say to trying to get Hermione back on a broom mate?"

"I would if you two were there, I know I'm safe when the three of us are together. Does that sound ok Harry, staying with me and some flying at the burrow?"

Ginny felt herself being sidelined again, Hermione was lying beside Harry with Ron sitting at the other side of the bed. She was relegated to standing at the bottom of the bed, but it was then she noticed something startling. "Madam Pomfrey, come quickly!"

She was there in a second and instantly spotted what had alarmed the girl. A black substance with the consistency of molten tar now replaced the trickle of blood that had been leaking from his scar.

Dumbledore smiled for the first time that night, "Keep it up you three, it's working."

That was all the encouragement Hermione needed, "Harry, we'll go shopping for all the clothes your aunt never bought you. We'll need to get you a passport for when we go on holiday, if I'm going on a broom it's only fair that you go on a plane. We'll visit the Burrow where you, Ron, the twins and Ginny can all help me learn to fly. That's if Mrs Weasley doesn't fill us with so much food that we can't get off the ground. It's going to be brilliant Harry! There are so many people that love you, and your going to spend the entire summer with them."

Harry gave a mighty scream as even more black puss was ejected from his scar. All felt the magical pulse that followed but were more concerned about the exhausted but relaxed boy who was lying on the bed.

Harry opened his eyes to see a pair of chocolate brown ones staring into his from only inches away. His voice was shaky but he really needed to know, "Did you really mean that? I can go home with you?"

Hermione was mopping up the black puss with a cloth a very quiet professor McGonagall had handed her. "I promised didn't I? I always keep my promises Harry."

Harry's smile lit up his entire face. He was lying there, drenched in sweat, with Hermione wiping black gunk off his hair and face yet he was happy. Not only were there no more Dursleys but he got to spend the summer with Hermione. The same girl he'd told every secret he ever had to, damn!

Hermione knew what his reaction would be to learning she had heard every word, she leaned closer and whispered so only he could hear. "Don't worry, my lips are sealed."

He squeezed her hand in appreciation before turning to face Ron, "You ok there mate?"

"I am now, you had me worried for a while there Harry."

"You and me both Ron, you and me both. Is that you Ginny? You need to come a bit closer, sorry I can't see that far."

Considering she was now blushing profusely, Ginny wasn't too worried that Harry was having trouble seeing her. She sat beside Ron as she answered him. "I'm here Harry, don't worry about it. Your glasses went flying at the start."

"I need to thank you guys, I don't think I would have made it without knowing you were there for me. Voldemort plays on all your fears, and the part of him in my head knew everyone of mine."

Ginny understood perfectly, "He's an evil bastard Harry who would soon have figured them out. That's what he did with me, wormed his way in until I believed his lies."

Albus knew that as headmaster, he should mention the colourful use of language by his students but felt the circumstances justified a little leeway tonight. "Voldemort's fooled a lot of witches and wizards Miss Weasley, don't beat yourself up about it. Harry my boy, how are you feeling?"

"Bloody awful professor and to be honest, really miffed at you. When were you going to tell me I had a bit of Voldemort in my head?"

Albus at least had the grace to look ashamed, "Alas Harry, there are things I'm afraid you're not ready to hear."

Harry had half expected that kind of answer, "'Can you tell me this sir, if I moved school, would Voldemort still come after me?"

Albus was at a loss until Harry explained his reasoning, "What I'm trying to find out is whether it's me or Hogwarts that has me

bumping into him with such regularity? If I leave Hogwarts, will it solve my Voldemort problem?"

Dumbledore had to answer truthfully, "No Harry, I'm sorry but it wouldn't."

"It's ok sir, that was the answer I expected. Now I know it's definitely me he's after, I just don't know why. Would you care to tell me sir?"

Albus was saved from answering by Hermione, though perhaps 'saved' was the wrong word. Postponed for now was all the girl appeared prepared to accept.

"Harry, don't worry about it tonight. Let's take some time to write down the questions we want answered. If professor Dumbledore can't or won't answer them, we'll go looking elsewhere for help."

Ron was quick to back her up, "Hermione's right as usual Harry. Just wait until mum hears you had a piece of Voldemort in your head and Professor Dumbledore did nothing about it. She's already boiling mad that the last two defence professors attempted to kill us. You know she'll be looking for answers as well."

Ginny couldn't resist adding her backing as well, "Anyone who can defeat a sixty foot basilisk with a sword should not be treated like a child."

With Minerva and Poppy glaring at him as well, Albus realised he'd soon have to reveal even more of his secrets. Not something he was looking forward to.

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The spirit in Albania was panicking now, the magical pulse signifying a second of his precious treasures had been destroyed just passed through him. Two were in the possession of his most faithful followers, another two protected by magical traps with the fifth hidden inside Hogwarts. He had intended to use the Potter brat's murder to create his sixth, that night had not only seen him banished to this state but cost him another soul anchor as well.

If they continued to be destroyed at this rate, he wouldn't make it back to Britain in time to save any of them. Thankfully his three

remaining horcruxes would know the fate of their brothers and begin actively seeking hosts to safeguard themselves against destruction.

His best bet at the moment was to find a bird to possess come first light. Its body wouldn't last too long before he needed to take another but he was now all out of options. This was the quickest way to get to Riddle Manor.

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Sibyll thanked her inner eye for leading her to this room, it was perfect to hide, eh store these extra sherry bottles that had somehow accumulated in her quarters. Her great gift was also leading Sibyll up the side of this amazing room, straight toward a tiara. That same inner eye was now screaming at her to wear the tiara, promising her life would never be the same again. What did she have to lose?

Thanks for reading

A/N in this story Nagini had not been made into a horcrux yet, and of course Voldemort is unaware that Harry was.

Chapter 2

Harry awoke to his favourite pair of brown eyes in the entire world. Hermione had apparently refused to leave his side last night, given what happened the last time he let go her hand, they may be joined at the hip for quite a while.

Madam Pomfrey had been reluctant to force the issue, in fact the Hogwarts healer enlarged the bed so they would both be more comfortable. Considering Mr Potter was already in an exhausted sleep and both students were fully clothed, neither Minerva nor Albus had raised any objections.

Harry noticed he could see Hermione better than he normally could without his glasses and decided to tell madam Pomfrey about it later. First he had to greet his friend that he had so sorely missed. "Good morning Hermione, I'm really pleased to see you."

She gave him a brilliant smile in return, "Me to Harry, Just don't mention us sleeping in the same bed to my dad!"

Harry was rapidly getting worried when he heard her giggling, it was with great relief he realised she was joking. Joking or not, Harry certainly wouldn't be mentioning it to either of her parents. "Are you sure they'll let me stay Hermione?"

Again the brilliant smile, "Harry, as soon as we get out of here I need to borrow Hedwig. Let them know I'm ok and ask permission for you to stay. They're always saying I can have friends stay over, I've just never had any before."

In his eagerness to please, Harry missed the longing in her voice, "I can cook, clean and do the garden. I promise I won't be a bother."

Hermione squeezed his hand in reassurance, hearing what he went through at the Dursleys his response was understandable. Hermione now considered it her mission in life to let Harry see what a wonderful person he was, not the useless freak image that the Dursleys had built in his mind. "Harry, you're my friend, not some servant. We will have a few chores to do over the summer but nothing much. The Grangers are not the Dursleys. When you stayed with the Weasleys, you just helped out the same as Ron. That's the way it will be in our house, though perhaps a shade quieter!"

Harry thought he had messed up and she hadn't even asked her parents yet, "Sorry Hermione, I just don't have any experience of how normal families operate. You'll have to keep me right."

The smile actually increased in luminance, "Oh don't worry Harry, I intend to."

A very recognisable voice came from behind him, "Typical, she's just woke up and already telling us what to do. I should be mad at you Harry for that normal families dig. Then I thought of the twins and Percy and had to agree, the Weasleys aren't normal."

This had them all chuckling before Harry replied, "Hey mate, even when she was petrified she was still getting us out of trouble. All Hagrid told us was to 'follow the spiders', Hermione here had the whole thing figured out. Not only what the monster was, but how it was getting about the castle. Brilliant or what!"

Ginny could hear the admiration and so much more in Harry's voice, she hadn't been aware how big a debt she owed Hermione as well. She had made her mind up to be Harry's friend and understood that Hermione would have to be included in there somewhere. Now Ginny found herself wanting to get to know the girl better.

If both Harry and her brother Ron thought she was great, who was she to disagree.

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Tom / Sibyll awoke in the room of requirements and was dumbfounded. He was supposed to awake in his own body, not this sherry sodden myopic mystic. What could have gone wrong?

The most powerful wizard since Merlin was reduced to crawling about the floor, on her hands and knees, searching for her glasses. When he decided just to summon them Tom discovered another major problem. After running his hands up and down this disgusting body, he couldn't find a wand anywhere.

'Using magic interferes with the inner eye!'

This was another slap in the face to Tom, how was it possible her soul was still in this body? That wouldn't happen unless...oh shit, she was a squib!

'Squib is just a label banded about to make others feel more powerful. A true seer uses their magic in a totally different way'

Tom was livid, he had the entire castle to choose from. How the hell did he end up with a squib? "If you're such a true seer, how the hell did you end up wearing the Diadem? Oh no, I'm talking to myself already, not good!"

Without being able to use her magic to build a new body, he was trapped in this one. Unable to perform magic and the only way to leave was when the body died, unfortunately it would kill him also. Shit, he couldn't even get the bitch to shut-up!

'Oh, you really aren't a morning person, are you? Maybe you need a morning glass of sherry to relax you, it always works for me'

Tom felt the compulsion charm, he had somewhere else to be. Not having his own body or even the ability to perform magic severely curtailed his options. He was going to have to walk out the front gate and get to Hogsmead. From the Leaky Cauldron he could floo to London, from there it would probably have to be muggle transport to Little Hangleton. He needed a plan, and fast.

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Albus never actually got to sleep last night so to say he awoke would be inaccurate. He had tossed and turned all night. Not so much wrestling with his conscience over the treatment of Harry, more like wondering what in Merlin's name he was going to do now. His suspicions had all been confirmed last night but his one and only plan had been wiped away as effectively as the black gunk oozing out the boy's forehead.

Yes Harry had been a horcrux but now he didn't have to die before the dark lord could be defeated. Instead, the boy had proved beyond doubt the power of love he carried inside him was strong enough to triumph over Voldemort himself. With the prophecy and brother wands to take into consideration, Albus hadn't a clue what to do next.

This was not an option the old wizard could run with for long, hence the tossing and turning all night.

The wards at the Dursleys were going to have to be sacrificed, there was far too much for Albus to lose for very little benefit. The love he would receive from spending a summer with the Grangers would do the lad far more good than those relatives of his. Also it would buy him some grace with Poppy, Minerva and Molly, telling them Harry had to return to Little Whining would be about as pleasant as having your nuts crushed in a vice.

Albus was going to have to choose his battles carefully or he could lose the boy's respect. Harry was a forgiving lad but Albus feared Miss Granger wouldn't be so quick where Harry's welfare was concerned. It was abundantly clear whose opinion Harry valued more.

In the last few battles with Voldemort, Albus had been at best a spectator. The prophecy made it clear whose fight this was, Dumbledore's fight was to ensure he didn't get sidelined altogether. If he revealed the existence of a prophecy, Miss Granger would immediately begin researching how Harry could hear the full thing. Should that knowledge get back to Voldemort ... what?

Tom had already made Harry his number one target, discovering that Harry had a power Voldemort didn't know about might stay his hand. The trouble of trying to guess what Tom would do is that it was impossible to put yourself in his position. His fear of death might make him stay well away from the one who could kill him, then again he might come after Harry with everything he's got.

None of this conjecture though would help Albus when Harry asked his questions. Maybe Miss Weasley was correct, anyone who could defeat a basilisk with only a sword should not be treated like a child.

-oOoOo-

Minerva got a shock when she found Sibyll at her office door, she didn't think Sibyll actually knew where her office was. That was nothing though to the shock received when she heard why she was here.

"Minerva, I have a favour to ask. A friend of mine has just gotten married and no longer wishes to teach. She has recommended me for the now vacant post, it's an all girls school in Canada. The only problem being I would really have to leave Hogwarts today. Since it's only two weeks until the end of term, I was hoping you could release me early. I would hate to lose this opportunity to broaden my horizons."

The thought of Sibyll disappearing over the horizon was enough to put Minerva in a good mood that would last months. She'd been desperate to see the back of this woman for years. There was no way Sibyll was missing this job, Minerva would strap her onto the back of a broom and fly her to Canada herself.

"Sibyll, you can leave today with our thanks and gratitude for all the service you've given Hogwarts and her students. Chances like this come so rarely in life and one must grab them with both hands. Surely your inner eye told you I would say yes?"

"Of course it did Minerva, since you though are not blessed with this gift, I thought it only fair that I came and spoke to you in person. I shall miss our little chats Minerva, perhaps there will be someone just as stubborn and short sighted in my new school? Goodbye!"

With that Sibyll left a smiling Minerva, the deputy headmistress didn't care if this woman enjoyed a final verbal victory. Trelawney was leaving Hogwarts so Minerva had won the war, happy days!

-oOoOo-

Hermione was reluctant to leave Harry's side even when he was being examined but Madam Pomfrey had put her foot down. It still needed Harry speaking with the young witch to get her to leave his side. "Hermione, you have an important letter to write. Say hi to Hedwig for me and I'll catch up as soon as Madam Pomfrey is finished with me."

She still didn't want to leave but was desperate to contact her parents, Hermione wouldn't be able to settle until she had written confirmation that Harry would be spending the summer with her. If her parents said no then Hermione didn't know what she would do, she'd made a promise to Harry that wouldn't be broken if she had

anything to do with it. With one final hug of Harry, she set off to the Gryffindor dorms to write her letter.

Poppy finally got down to her examination of the lad, "Well Mr Potter, how do you feel today?"

"Actually Madam Pomfrey. I'm feeling great! My eyesight appears to have improved as well. Getting that piece of Voldemort out of me should have been done years ago."

"I couldn't agree more Mr Potter but I never knew it was there. It didn't show on any of the many scans I've performed on you over the last two years. My scans are showing a difference now though, that abomination must have been parasitical and feeding off your magic to sustain itself. It may even have been responsible for your really poor eyesight. I'm showing a marked improvement in your vision. I know you're going to hate this but I want you here for at least another day until I can see your condition stabilising. No magic, no excitement and plenty of rest is what's required."

Harry knew from bitter experience it was pointless to argue with the Hogwarts healer, "Yes Madam Pomfrey. Do you really think there's a chance I won't need my glasses?"

Poppy could see the hope shining through his expression but didn't want to build his expectations too high. "Mr Potter, at this point I wouldn't rule anything in or out. It may take a few days until we discover exactly what effect not having that piece of filth in your head will have. As usual for you Mr Potter, there is nothing out there to compare this with, it's never been recorded as happening before now."

Great Harry thought, just what I need. Another reason to be different from everyone else. Each time something like this happened, he saw the chances of him ever being 'just Harry' disappear off into the distance.

Poppy also disappeared off into the distance, well heading off to find Minerva to be precise. Harry's readings were all over the place but every one heading in the right direction. He was already at the top end of the power scale for a Hogwarts student, if the readings kept climbing he would soon outstrip the staff and begin approaching Dumbledore's level. Poppy's instincts were telling her that the lad

would end up surpassing the headmaster's, these same instincts were also leading her to Minerva's door rather than his.

Discovering that Albus suspected the lad had that in his head yet did nothing about it shocked the healer to her core. Combined with the revelations about the lad's home life, a home Albus had placed him in, left both women with no confidence that the headmaster would do the right thing where Harry was concerned.

Informing his head of house about his condition fulfilled Poppy's requirements as the healer at Hogwarts. What Minerva then chose to do with that information was entirely up to the Gryffindor head. Poppy suspected Albus would be searching for any reason to deny Harry an explanation, far less the freedom from his relatives he craved.

Minerva had confided in her last night that she felt the same, both women were going to do everything that they could to ensure Harry Potter never had to go anywhere near those relatives again.

-oOoOo-

Emma Granger was startled by the silent appearance of the beautiful white owl. She had been enjoying the sunshine in her back garden when Hedwig found her, Emma removed the note and shouted for her husband, "Dan, we've got mail from Hermione!"

Dan appeared at once, "Finally, no more of this 'doing fine but unable to write' rubbish. I told you she should have gone to Abbey College but you wouldn't listen. You can't let an eleven year old decide which school is most suitable for her, that's our job!"

This was an old argument so Emma ignored her husband as she quickly read through Hermione's letter. She started reading the important bits out loud as soon as she'd read them. "Hermione's fine, perfect health ... will tell us all about it when we get her off the train. Oh, she wants a friend to spend the entire summer with us ... it's a boy!"

That was all Dan needed to hear. "A boy! Not one of those redheads surely? Only Hermione could attend a private school and end up friends with the poorest people there."

"Daniel Granger! You know your father is turning in his grave at this moment. Ashamed that his son has turned into such a snob."

"What? Is it wrong to want the best for our daughter? Neither of us had bugger-all when growing up. We've done our best to make sure Hermione could have everything she could want."

Emma was exasperated with her husband, "Yes, everything but friends! Now she's asked if her best friend can stay the summer and you're working yourself up to saying no?"

Daniel appeared confused, "I thought her best friend was that Harry character? You know the one, cheap glasses, bad hair, worse clothes and a ruddy scar on his forehead."

Emma's gaze bored into her husband more effectively than one of their many drills. "Yes he is Dan, and if you ever want your daughter to speak to you again, you will never repeat one word of that. It's Harry she's asked to stay, that's his owl patiently sitting in the tree, waiting on our reply."

"How can that young scruff afford a beautiful bird like that?"

Emma let him have it both barrels, "Daniel Granger, if you want to ruin your relationship with Hermione just keep going, I guarantee you will achieve your goal."

Dan was squirming under his wife's gaze, "I just wish she'd choose some better friends."

Emma was relentless, "Don't you mean better-off friends? You can't go through life judging people by their wealth. Didn't Hermione tell us that man that Arthur fought with last summer bought his way out of prison years ago, do you want her to be friends with his son? I realise that, as a father, no one will ever be good enough for your daughter ..."

"Was that why your father hated me?"

Emma was at first reluctant to answer but Dan needed to change his ways, "Not really, daddy thought you were an arrogant arsehole."

"What? Well at least your mother liked me."

Emma shook her head, "Not really, mum was just better at hiding it."

"Oh great! How the hell did we ever end up married then?"

Emma knew she had him now, "Like you, they forgot the most important thing. Their daughter loved you very much. This is only Hermione's friend, look on it as practice for when she eventually brings home a boyfriend. Harry is apparently very good at sports, plays on their house team. You could take him down the golf club with you?"

"I suppose I could use a caddy."

"Daniel!"

"All right then, but we have to at least take him in hand and buy some decent clothes for the lad. We can't introduce him as Hermione's friend from her exclusive school when he's dressed like a ragamuffin!"

Emma was shaking her head but at least she had gotten him to agree. If Hermione's letters and holiday conversations were anything to go by, this could be the boyfriend that she'd be introducing them to in a few years. She refused to stand back and watch her husband grow apart from the daughter he adored because of his stupidity. A few words here and a nudge there should keep him on the right path. If necessary, she would unleash her secret weapon. A few tears from Hermione and Dan would be as malleable as putty.

It was going to be a hard lesson for him to learn, wanting the best for their daughter meant letting Hermione make her own decisions. As she got older they were sure not to agree with some of them. Emma quickly penned a positive reply to Hermione, she really was counting the days until her daughter was home again.

-oOoOo-

Albus didn't question Poppy's reasoning for detaining Harry another day in the infirmary, he was too pleased to receive more time for his attempt at solving the puzzle he'd backed himself into. The only option he could see at the moment was to answer the questions honestly, to refuse outright or be caught lying would be seriously

detrimental to his relationship with the boy. That was something Albus couldn't allow, despite his aversion to spilling his secrets.

There was also Sibyll's departure to consider. He wasn't worried that the prophecy could leak from that source, a seer never remembers when they give an actual prophecy and even truth serum couldn't get what wasn't there. Albus had kept her on in the castle in the hope that one day she might make another, thirteen years later and it was time to cut his losses.

Minerva couldn't disguise her delight when she broke the news to him, after Sibyll had left the castle of course. Albus had decided not to offer the divination course any longer. They would get someone in part-time to cover those who were already a year or two into the course, but it would no longer be available to third or sixth year students.

This would cause Minerva headaches with the timetable but at least solve one problem, Miss Granger had requested to take every OWL course Hogwarts offered. Without divination, she could take the Muggle Studies course self-study and attend all the other classes.

He asked Minerva to pass on this decision, he didn't want the girl thinking there was a hidden agenda here. The last thing he needed was to be on Miss Granger's shit list for something he had no control over.

-oOoOo-

Hermione was currently sitting in the infirmary, keeping Harry company. All the petrified students and the cat had made full recoveries, leaving just the two of them there. It had seemed strange sitting in the great hall for dinner without Harry, so she had headed here directly after finishing her meal. They were avoiding talking about anything Harry had revealed while she was petrified, neither wanted to say anything about the possibility of them spending the summer together in case they jinxed it.

They were concentrating on what they would ask the headmaster when they heard Hedwig pecking at the window. The clever bird must have known how anxious they were to read the reply, Harry reckoned she was smart enough to know what was in the note. Hedwig didn't want to return to Privet Drive any more than he did.

Hermione thanked the precious bird profusely before hastily reading the note, she knew her dad could be a bit strange but hoped her mother would have talked him around.

Harry couldn't believe how nervous he was as Hermione opened the note. A squeal of joy was rapidly followed by her pouncing on him, her enthusiasm had both of them bouncing on the bed until Madam Pomfrey appeared. Hermione had both arms around Harry and was practically lying on top of him, normally she would have been mortified to be caught in this position but was way too happy to care.

"Madam Pomfrey, my parents just wrote back. Harry's spending the summer with me. Oh Harry, this is great! We'll have so much fun."

"Personally, I'll be glad to see the back of you two. I understand you're competitive Miss Granger but spending more time in my care than Mr Potter is taking that competitiveness to a whole new level." The smile on Poppy's face ensured the pair she was joking.

Harry answered her back in the same vein, "Madam Pomfrey, I mean this in the best possible way but I hope we don't see you at all next year."

Hermione couldn't help but laugh at that, Poppy joined in before replying, "Mr Potter, you manage that and I'll make sure the headmaster gives you a special award for services to the school."

This turned Harry's thoughts to another such award and his first magical friend, "Has the headmaster got Hagrid out of prison yet?"

Poppy's mood sobered immediately, "Unfortunately not yet Mr Potter, the ministry appear to be dragging their heels on this issue."

The power pulsed off Harry in waves, shaking everything that wasn't bolted down. "Fudge was quick enough to arrest him, actually came to Hogwarts personally. Now he's been made to look a fool, he's childishly keeping Hagrid locked up."

Hermione was holding Harry's hand while running the fingers of her other one through his hair. "Harry you need to calm down, we all agree with you but wrecking the infirmary won't help Hagrid."

Harry began to respond to her calming touch and words, "Sorry Hermione, but I was there when Fudge took him away. Hagrid was terrified but still went with him, I don't even want to think about what could make Hagrid that frightened. We all know Hagrid has rather dangerous ideas about what makes a good pet, we also know he could have tied Fudge in a knot before the minister could have reached for his wand. Instead, he went with him, is that the actions of someone who's setting a monster on school children? Malfoy caused it and even gets Dumbledore sacked yet Hagrid is the one who ends up in prison, that's just so wrong!"

Hermione could see her actions were having an effect so continued running her fingers through his hair, it wasn't exactly a hardship. "I know Harry but what can we do? You at least spoiled his plans and freed Dobby. Malfoy didn't get off scot free."

"We really need to get something on him. I can't stand the thought of that man nearly killing us all and yet is untouchable because of who he is."

At that, there was a rather loud pop as Dobby appeared by the side of Harry's bed for the second time that term. At least Harry wasn't having to re-grow all the bones in his arm this time. "Harry Potter sir, old master is too clever to be caught. He has a secret chamber under the study floor that he keeps all his evil things in. Old master boasts that the minister has stood above it and never even knew about it. He will try and keep your friend in bad place because he is your friend."

Harry couldn't help but smile at the little guy who'd caused him so much grief this year, "Thank you Dobby, we know the exact person to give that information to. You're a good friend."

Dobby now had tears running down his little cheeks but the largest smile imaginable on his face. Harry Potter called him friend, all was right in Dobby's world.

It was an expression mirrored by Arthur Weasley when he received that information. Malfoy had tried to murder his daughter, there was no way Arthur was standing for that.

-oOoOo-

Poppy held Harry for yet another day so it was with great relief they strolled into the Gryffindor common room that Sunday morning to be greeted by all present.

Neville was first to ask, "Hey Harry, where's your glasses? Surely they weren't broken so badly that Hermione couldn't fix them?"

"Of course Hermione could fix them, I just don't need them any longer. Hey Ron, we're off to see the wizard, wanna come?"

Hermione was sniggering at the reference that went right over Ron's head, "No mate, I'm just sitting here, basking in the anticipation of seeing Draco Malfoy's face. Dad's even forgiven me for the whole car thing. Why would I want to ruin a good mood like that by listening to Dumbledore? You know Hermione will need to explain it to me later anyway, so why bother. Hey, that's just like history of magic classes!"

Ron's good mood was easily explained, today's Prophet was sitting on the table and featured a picture of Malfoy being arrested on the front cover. Arthur had made sure the details got to the press before there could be any form of cover-up, the complete list of prohibited items found in his possession also found itself printed and it was long and nasty. The fact that the name Weasley was featured throughout the article just made Ron appreciate it more. Even if Lucius managed to buy his way out of prison again, the damage to his public image was massive.

The pair set off toward the wonderful wizard's office, no Toto and definitely no gingham but it still raised a smile between the two of them.

Dean asked Ron the question that had been troubling him, "Doesn't it bother you that those two are going together?"

Ron just shrugged his shoulders, "They've been 'going together' since first year. Eventually, one of them will notice and admit it!"

Dean asked again, "And it doesn't bother you?"

This was met by another shrug as Ron considered his answer. "I'm not really looking to date yet but can I ask you all something?"

Whenever you're ready to date, would Hermione be your first choice of girl to ask out?"

Both Dean and Seamus quickly confirmed their answer was no while Neville appeared angry, "She's your friend Ron, how can you talk about her this way?"

Ron was apologetic, "Oh don't get me wrong Neville, Hermione is a great friend. As a girlfriend though, we would drive each other nuts! This way I get to keep my friends and have handy sources for advice when I do start dating."

Neville appeared placated, "You'd ask them for advice on that?"

"Well who else am I going to ask? Percy, the twins?" The shudder that ran through all of them at the thought of asking the twins advice on a sensitive matter answered that one. They'd rather ask McGonagall.

"Ok, so we're all agreed that, while Hermione is great, she wouldn't necessarily be our first choice as a girlfriend?" This was met by three nods, though Neville looked a trifle reluctant.

Ron continued, "Right, you've seen the girl you fancy. Who do you think would be your main rival for her affections if he showed any interest?"

No hesitation this time as all three replied, "Harry Potter!"

Ron nodded in agreement, "Now do you see my point? Harry and Hermione together removes our main competition without doing us any damage. That's all good in my book."

Dean's face lit up with the revelation, "So Harry's already snagged, leaving all the other girls in Hogwarts free for us?"

Ron again nodded, "Exactly, as long as their surname isn't Weasley, the rest of the girls are available."

Neville was disappointed, there went his second choice as well. Looks like he would just have to try outside Gryffindor house. At least there were a couple of cute Hufflepuffs.

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Harry had asked their head of house to accompany them to this meeting, recognising an ally when he saw one.

Minerva was delighted to attend, she'd heard from Poppy what happened the other night and saw the results in this morning's paper. She hoped Albus didn't underestimate these two, getting Malfoy arrested was something even Dumbledore had failed to manage.

When they were all sitting, Albus started the meeting. He had decided to give them most of the story and attempt to direct where they went after that. With Minerva here, his opportunities to embellish the truth were severely limited. He was going for shock and disorientation in the hope that at least some of his secrets would survive.

With that goal in mind, Albus brought out his pensieve and began his presentation.

"Let me start at the beginning and we can move on from there, I would rather you didn't interrupt but waited until I was finished before asking any questions I've left unanswered."

Albus watched as Miss Granger prepared materials to take notes, he had expected nothing less.

"Before you were born Harry, a prophecy was made about a child who could defeat Voldemort. That child is you."

Albus started his pensieve and the ghostly figure of Sibyll performed for the guests, he expected a couple of more sentences from him and he could bid them on their way.

"Your parents went into hiding using some very powerful magic called the fidelius charm, they could never be found unless their chosen secret keeper told you where they were. Unfortunately their secret keeper turned out to be a death eater who betrayed them to Voldemort. Your mother cast a very powerful protection on you and then sacrificed herself so you could live. That protection remains intact because you live with her sister."

That was a bitter pill for Harry to swallow so Albus attempted to justify his actions.

"As you are now aware, not all death eaters were dealt with at that time. Your parents' best friend had betrayed them to Voldemort and we didn't know who to trust. Staying at Privet Drive has kept you safe all these years, though I must profess to being severely disappointed at your relatives behaviour toward you."

Hermione was writing furiously as Dumbledore told his tale, questions were flowing onto the parchment in front of her as they awaited an opportunity to ask them.

Albus thought he had said enough, they hadn't been as impressed with the pensieve as he'd hoped and seemed to take the whole prophecy thing in their stride. The only hint of anger was when he mentioned the Dursleys, he now understood what a wise move it was allowing Harry to spend the summer with the Grangers.

The pair had spoke about this for hours and their biggest question was why did Voldemort come after Harry as a baby? The prophecy explained some of that but not all. They'd agreed that Hermione would ask the questions and Harry would only intervene if he felt she was missing something.

Hermione got straight to the heart of the matter, "Headmaster, how did Voldemort get to hear about the prophecy?"

Minerva was becoming more impressed with these two every time she came in contact with them, that question had immediately put Albus back on his heels.

"Miss Granger, what led you to that question?"

"Well there obviously had to be a reason why Voldemort keeps coming after Harry, the prophecy answers that. There were just two people in that room, a true seer never remembers a prophecy so that only leaves you headmaster."

This was definitely not an avenue Albus wanted this discussion to go down. If he didn't answer though, it would appear as if he told Voldemort the prophecy. "Our security was not what it should have been that night, a death eater was hiding outside the door and heard

the first part of the prophecy. Voldemort doesn't know the second half and I think it would be in our interest to keep it that way."

Harry didn't know what to make of the prophecy, he would talk it over with Hermione later rather than have the headmaster say what he wanted it to mean. Not saying anything about the bit of Voldemort in his head and twelve years of the Dursleys were two massive black marks against the headmaster. Harry didn't know how far he could trust him anymore, which was why they had McGonagall here. He thought Hermione's question was a very important one and could sense there was something the headmaster didn't want to tell them, "How do you know a death eater overheard it, unless you also know who it was?"

This was not the way Albus envisaged this going, he tried to bluster. "That's not really relevant to our discussion here..."

Hermione also saw why this could be vital, she interrupted the headmaster. "No? What's more relevant is who it could be. It's obviously someone we know or you wouldn't be attempting to change the subject. Since neither Harry nor I know that many magical people it shouldn't be a large list, someone at Hogwarts even?"

Hermione was thinking out loud, something they did a lot when trying to solve a particularly tricky problem. When Harry thought of death eaters and adults at Hogwarts, one name jumped out at him. It jumped out so violently that he was on his feet and shouted the name. "SNAPE!"

All three could see from Dumbledore's immediate reaction that Harry had hit the bull's-eye, the headmaster attempted to recover but just dug his hole deeper. "That's Professor Snape Harry."

The outpouring in the infirmary was nothing compared to what Harry felt now. "That thing is responsible for the murder of my parents yet you have the nerve to reprimand me for not using his title? Very well HEADMASTER, keep death eater Snape away from me or I won't be responsible for my actions. Hermione, I think we're finished here."

Hermione was gathering up her stuff as Harry headed out the door, she couldn't resist a final question toward her head of house. "Professor McGonagall, did you know about this?"

Minerva was simmering with anger at the moment but managed to be civil to her student, "Miss Granger, I didn't know about the prophecy until now, far less that it had been overheard. I can understand Mr Potter's reaction to this and fully support him, I would ask you to try and temper his reaction to this news. You are both of course excused any potions classes until the end of term. I will be personally explaining that decision to the professor involved, directly after I have a few words with the headmaster."

The emphasis McGonagall put on the term 'few words' didn't bode well for Dumbledore but Hermione was far too concerned about Harry to care. She followed Harry out the door and found him waiting at the bottom of the spiral staircase.

"Did McGonagall know?" Harry asked.

"She didn't even know about the prophecy Harry. It would seem only Dumbledore and that man knew what was going on."

"I don't think I can take much more of this Hermione. I had a bit of Voldemort's soul in my head and am apparently prophesised to kill him yet Dumbledore didn't bother to tell me. Meanwhile, the person at Hogwarts who is the bane of my life just happens to be the one who sold my parents to Voldemort. I feel as if my head is about to burst open! I'm so glad to be spending the summer with you, I wouldn't have lasted two days with the Dursleys, never mind two months."

"Harry, hang in there until we can get out of this place. We then have the entire summer to decide what to do next, we also will have my parents to discuss it with. Please don't do anything hasty until then."

"I'll try Hermione, I promise I'll try."

Hermione couldn't ask for any more than that. She took him by the hand and headed off for a walk around the lake, that might take the edge of his justifiable anger. She thought Harry had been coping well with the information Dumbledore was throwing at them but in

trying to protect Snape, he had lost the last bit of trust either had in the old wizard. Something would have to change in order for them to return to Hogwarts next year. The first time Harry and Snape met would result in fireworks.

Back in his office, Albus was wondering how that went downhill so fast, also how Harry had guessed so quickly and accurately. "Well, that could have gone better!"

"Albus, I am so angry with you right now, I suggest saving your attempts at humour for a more appropriate time. I hardly think losing two exceptional students is an occasion for frivolity!"

"I'm sorry Minerva but I'm not following your reasoning."

"Did you really think Mr Potter's comment was directed at merely leaving your office? Where Mr Potter goes, Miss Granger will surely follow. In fact I wouldn't be surprised that we lose quite a few students, once it becomes known that you are protecting Severus. There's no way Mr Potter will keep that to himself, and I for one don't blame him."

Albus was now paying full attention, Mr Potter needs to stay at Hogwarts to be under my protection."

"If you don't mind me saying so Albus, you're doing a piss-poor job of the protection part. Fawkes has done more to aid him than the entire staff of Hogwarts combined. How could you expect him to stay here with Severus still on the staff?"

Dumbledore didn't like his decisions being questioned, "Severus atones for his mistake every single day."

"No Albus, Sirius Black pays for his crime every single day. Severus spends his days tormenting children who are not in Slytherin. I intend to warn him that, should he approach Mr Potter, I will personally transform him into a flubberworm before letting some first years dissect him. I never thought I would ever utter these words but perhaps Sibyll has the right idea. Get the hell out of Hogwarts."

It was a thoughtful Albus who watched his deputy, and former staunchest supporter, storm out his office, presumably in search of Severus. If Minerva McGonagall was considering leaving Hogwarts,

then perhaps it was time to reconsider some of his decisions. He must have Harry here next year, and a competent defence teacher. Perhaps Severus would have to be sacrificed in aid of the greater good, it would also remove a major obstacle in appointing the defence professor he wanted.

He would need to have another conversation with Harry before he got on the express. At the moment though he had no idea what he was going to say to convince the lad to stay. Albus also had no idea that the silver instruments behind him that monitored Harry had overloaded when the boy lost his temper. They were now nothing more than trinkets for the headmaster to play with.

-oOoOo-

From the window in the Gryffindor common room, Ginny spotted the couple walking slowly around the lake. "Ron, their meeting must be over, they're both walking around the lake."

Ron was playing exploding snap with his other three dorm mates when he threw his cards into the centre. "Bloody hell, it must have gone really badly for Hermione to take him out there. Need to go, see you later guys."

Ron bolted out the portrait hole, his sister hot on his heels.

-oOoOo-

Kreacher felt the locket calling to him, emphasising his greatest failing. His beloved master Regulus had commanded Kreacher to destroy this thing and he had failed in that task. Now the thing called to Kreacher, mocked Kreacher, but he was faithful to his master. Kreacher would find a way to destroy this thing before he took his rightful place on the wall. Yes, Kreacher would follow his master's last order because he was a loyal Black elf.

-oOoOo-

Tom Riddle thought he was a vicious, heartless bastard but he had nothing on Mother Nature. The greatest wizard in the world was reduced to possessing a wood pigeon and following road signs to get home. His only available weapon now was to shit on people's shoulders. That weapon was totally useless, though he did use it

when he had a very sudden and unexpected meeting with a hawk. His unwilling host was dead and his spirit ejected before he even had time to react. Tom would love to try for a larger host next time but didn't have the energy required for the possession. At this rate it was going to be weeks before he got home.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 3

Ron and Ginny were listening carefully while Hermione went over their meeting with the headmaster, Harry sat and stared blankly at the lake.

Ron was confused by the prophecy, "So Harry has to banish Voldemort? Surely he's already done that? As a baby, last year with Quirrell and again twice last week. Does it have to be the last Tuesday in May at quarter to eight in the pissing rain before the bastard will stay dead?"

Ron knew right away there was worst to come, Harry didn't crack a smile at his joke and Hermione didn't bite his head off for swearing.

"We discovered how Voldemort found out about the prophecy, a death eater heard part of it and told his master. That's why he came after Harry that Halloween."

Now Ron was really worried, "Can I take it from both your moods it's someone we know?"

Harry spoke for the first time, "Oh we know him alright, just last week he took points off you for breathing too loud."

Snape couldn't have taken house points off Ron at the moment since he'd stopped breathing, his punishment for the torrent of abuse aimed at their potion's professor when Ron had once more commenced the intake of air would have seen Gryffindor house still in negative points as their children attended Hogwarts.

Ginny was taken aback to hear the hatred in Harry's voice as he spoke about this, even Tom Riddle didn't rate that tone from him. "Did Dumbledore tell you that Harry?"

Harry shook his head, "No Ginny, he was forced to tell us someone overheard the prophecy. Hermione quickly figured it had to be someone we knew or he wouldn't be so desperate to keep it from us. Outside of Hogwarts, the only witches and wizards we know all have red hair. Who does that leave?"

When Ron and Ginny used the same reasoning, both came to the same answer in seconds. "Snape!"

Hermione nodded in agreement, "Dumbledore appeared as if he'd swallowed a wasp when Harry figured it out, then proceeded to tell Harry it was 'professor' Snape. We got out of there after that, though McGonagall has excused us potions for the remainder of the term. Not that we would have gone back down there anyway!"

Ron's temper had been steadily growing, that was enough to push it to critical levels. "That's it, Snape is going to hear it from me, mum can deal with Dumbledore."

He stormed away in the direction of the castle as Ginny sighed, "You guys be ok? I need to go and stop him before he gets himself expelled!" A quick nod from Harry and Hermione had Ginny racing after her brother for the second time today.

Harry watched her go before turning to Hermione, "She really is a good kid, we should let her hang out with us more often."

Hermione tried not to laugh at his naivety, "Harry, could you stop calling Ginny a kid? She's only a year younger than you and, in case you missed it, has rather a large case of hero worship and a massive crush on you to match. Hearing you call her a kid would hurt her deeply."

"I noticed it at the summer but hoped she'd gotten over it."

An amused Hermione was still fighting to control her laughter, "Harry, her hero just slid to her rescue, slayed the monster with a sword no less before finishing off her attacker. Not only that but you then flew her out of there with the help of a mythical magical bird and helped get the bad guy arrested. Yes I can see why she would no longer have a crush on you, after dramatically saving her life." Hermione finally lost it at Harry's expression of abject terror. Basilisks he could handle but girls with crushes had him running scared and her giggling at his discomfort.

Harry finally caught on that Hermione was teasing him and figured that turn around was fair play. "Hey, I saved your life in first year as well, how come you were able to resist me?"

Harry saw instantly that he'd made a mistake. Hermione went from his giggling best friend to someone with a bright red face whose

eyes were looking anywhere for an escape route. Harry reacted at once, he clutched both her hands to him so she was unable to run away before he could apologise. "Hermione, I'm so sorry. You were trying to cheer me up and I embarrassed you, please forgive me? I understand why you're not crushing on me, you've never seen the boy who lived, you just see me."

"Harry, of course I forgive you. We were just having some fun and I shouldn't have reacted like that. What you need to understand though is that you are so much better than the boy who lived."

It was now Harry's turn to be embarrassed, "I was trying to cheer you up Harry but it would seem I'm not very good at it."

"Hermione, just the thought of spending the entire summer with you is enough to make me cheerful, you don't need to do anymore. You've already done more for me than anyone else."

"Thanks Harry, I was serious about Ginny though." She watched the terror return to his features before putting him out of his misery. "She really would be hurt if she heard you calling her a kid!" That had both of them laughing as Harry's troubles were put aside for now. They would decide their next move during the summer holidays.

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Ginny was rushing toward the potions lab, hopefully in time to stop her brother before he got himself into serious trouble again. She spotted him standing still and was about to ask him what he was doing when his hand was over her mouth again. Ginny was not amused and getting ready to bite the prat when she heard the instantly recognisable raised voice of their head of house. She nodded to Ron in understanding and he removed his hand as they both listened to the clearly furious McGonagall.

"I don't care that Dumbledore trusts you, I don't! You will stay away from Mr Potter and Miss Granger for the rest of this term. Should you approach them in any way I will be coming after you, not as the deputy headmistress but as a friend of Lily and James Potter seeking revenge. You know there is not a court in the land that would convict me for any harm I did to you. You cost that boy his parents and then have the audacity to treat him like dirt on your shoes because he resembles his father. I refuse to sit at the same

table as such a monster, we shall see which one of us is at Hogwarts next term."

Both Weasleys quickly drew back into the shadows as McGonagall stormed out Snape's room, they also noticed she had her wand in her hand and an expression on her face that would frighten braver men than Snape.

When McGonagall was a safe enough distance away, Ginny whispered to her brother. "I hope you're not still planning on going in there after that? Can you imagine what kind of mood he's in now?"

Ron took her by the arm and they both headed away from the dungeons, "There's no way I can compete with the rollicking McGonagall's just given him, you only caught the end of it. It was bloody brilliant! What we need is a way to let people know what that git did without mentioning the prophecy."

Ginny agreed but added her own bit too, "We also need to let mum and dad know. Poor Harry, he never seems to catch a break does he?"

"Ginny, the twins and me only saw a part of how he's treated during the summer. Those bars we brought back with us trapped him and Hedwig inside a tiny room. I'm so glad he's not going back there this summer. I use to think it would be so grand to be the boy who lived, now I've seen what it's like close up, you can keep it. I wouldn't wish that life on Malfoy."

Ginny had been giving their problem some thought while Ron was speaking, "What if we just said Snape is a death eater who was responsible for the attack on the Potters? It's still true without mentioning the thing we don't want to. A piece of news like that would be all over Hogwarts by dinner time."

"Ginny, you're a genius! Now that Harry and Hermione aren't going to his classes, then neither am I. do you think we could organise a boycott of potions for the remainder of the term?"

"If we tell mum and dad why we're doing it, I'm sure they'll support us. Why just potions though? Everyone walking out the great hall when he appeared would have an even greater effect."

"Yes, we would all starve to death! You can't be serious Ginny?"

"Ron, even you couldn't eat with that man sitting there now we know what he's done. I doubt very much if Harry and Hermione will be able to either."

Ron had to agree with her, he hated it when Ginny was right. Mum might have to send food parcels to Hogwarts or they would all be a lot thinner when they got off the express. They began hunting for the twins, if anyone knew the best way to get this information out there then it was Fred and George Weasley.

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They strolled back into the castle after spending hours chatting quietly by the lake, only to discover that once again Harry was the centre of attention in Hogwarts. Hannah Abbott and Susan Bones were the first to approach them. "Is it true Harry? Was Snape involved in your parents' deaths?"

Harry figured that after the whole 'heir of Slytherin' and parselmouth fiasco he would be getting used to the attention by now, he wasn't and still hated every second of it.

"Snape is a death eater and, because of him my parents were forced to go into hiding. He's the one responsible for having Voldemort try to kill me."

Hermione was at least pleased that both girls reacted more to the injustice done to Harry than they did to the name Voldemort.

Susan felt terrible for her reaction to the whole 'heir of Slytherin' nonsense, the entire school had turned against Harry yet he'd still saved them. It was an easy decision for both girls to make, they would be boycotting potions and encouraging everyone else to do the same.

The four entered into the great hall for lunch together. Harry had barely sat down at the Gryffindor table when Snape entered and took his usual seat amongst the staff. Harry's appetite vanished at the first sight of the hated man, he pushed his plate away and stood to leave. Harry had unshed tears in his eyes when the entire Gryffindor table stood as well, the real shocker though was when

McGonagall threw her napkin onto her unfinished plate and left the hall.

Her actions did more to confirm Snape's guilt than any rumour. The Gryffindors marched out the doors, only to find the entire Hufflepuff and majority of Ravenclaw students were right behind them.

Other members of staff also tossed their napkins onto the table and left.

Only two people appeared unaffected by what was happening around them, Snape and Dumbledore. Both sat calmly eating their lunch while inside they were seething with anger yet helpless to do anything.

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Tom was also seething with anger and lacked the magic to do anything about it. When the fat muggle put his hand on her arse, Tom wished to crucio this arsehole until his eyes popped out his head. He obviously didn't need them anyway if he couldn't see what an ugly bitch Tom was.

'That's only your opinion Tom, I've had my share of admirers over the years.'

That thought saw Tom grab the glass of sherry and gulp it down. He'd been forced to finally enter a muggle pub when this bitch in his head refused to stop her incessant complaining that she needed her pick-me-up. He also had to contend with the rather obvious withdrawal symptoms this body started to exhibit. It was getting harder not to draw attention to himself when the body you inhabit wouldn't stop trembling due to lack of alcohol. A few sherries later and both Sibyll and her body had relaxed enough for Tom to continue normally, except for this fat prick trying to pick him up. This guy must be really desperate if he was making a move on Trelawney.

"Wow, I sure like a woman who can handle her liquor. Let me buy you another of those darling?"

Tom had to get out of here before he ripped out this man's throat with Trelawney's teeth. "No thanks, I actually have a train to catch. I have someone waiting on me and really have to be going."

The slob actually appeared disappointed at this, he either needed to drink less or urgently see an optician. "I should have known there'd be a man waiting for you, all the best ones are already taken."

Tom left the pub with Sibyll singing a happy song in his head, she was introducing the dark lord to a whole new branch of torture. Tom was receiving first hand knowledge of just how effective that torture could be.

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Kreacher's will to resist was waning, the voice was now promising him that by wearing the locket he would fulfil his masters orders and be a loyal Black elf. It had been so many years since the old elf had contact with someone other than his mistress that his grip on reality was not all it should have been. To destroy this thing was his greatest desire, listening to promises of how to accomplish that task was sweet music to his very large ears. He was old, he was alone, perhaps the voice could be telling the truth? Kreacher could resist no more, he pulled the chain over his head and the locked came to rest just above his navel.

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Harry was overwhelmed by the public show of support he received, it may have been generated in large parts by the general hatred of their potions professor but he chose to believe it was in support of his parents. McGonagall had also made her position known to the entire school, she was firmly on their side in this issue. That Ron chose to forego food showed his depth of commitment, though he did grab whatever food he could get his hands on as they left. Slapping everything between two slices of bread for the most unusual sandwich any of them had ever seen.

Harry felt he had to say something, "Thanks guys for the support, but you know Snape is going to make sure he's at every meal from now on?"

It was Neville who was first to answer, "Harry, there is no way I could be in the same room as him and stomach food. I could do with losing a bit of weight anyway. I've already written to gran and told her I won't be taking any potions classes he teaches, they can expel me first."

A loud pop announced Dobby's arrival, "Would Harry Potter and his friends like some lunch?" Before anyone had time to answer, every flat surface other than the floor filled with platters of food.

This drew cheers from the Gryffidors and Dobby found himself the recipient of a Hermione hug. She was delighted, understanding Harry well enough to know he would soon be blaming himself for everyone missing meals. "Dobby, you're the best! Is there any way our friends in the other houses that walked out can get food too?"

Dobby was gone for a minute or so before returning with the good news. "The castle elves are serving lunch in two of the other houses also. They ask that you keep this quiet in case they are ordered to stop."

Harry felt so much better with that news, Snape would have starved them out and wouldn't hesitate to stop the elves if he found out. He was confident though that no one in Gryffindor would be saying anything.

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Molly Weasley received a note from Ginny, part of her still wishes she'd brought her daughter home to the Burrow. She was forced to concede her husband's point though, Ginny was better dealing with this now rather than letting it fester for the entire summer before facing the rest of the school.

Molly was one of the few who had heard what had happened in the infirmary, she had given Albus a right royal chewing-out via the floo for not doing anything about Harry's condition.

Dumbledore's reputation had taken quite a beating in the Weasley household while young Harry Potter could do no wrong. She had sat with Arthur in the office of the most powerful wizard in the land yet they had all been helpless to save their daughter. When Harry entered with Ginny on one arm and a heavily limping Ron supported

on his other, Molly thought her heart was going to burst with joy and relief. To then provide the information that led to a modicum of revenge on the person responsible for Ginny almost being murdered sealed it for the Weasley parents. All this while Albus stood by helplessly meant Harry Potter had enough positive merit points accumulated with them to forgive him anything, even Ron was forgiven for stealing the car for his part in rescuing his sister.

Reading that they were all fine, with Harry eventually out of the infirmary, only improved Molly's good mood. Discovering that they were planning to boycott potions, and the reason behind it banished that good mood to the four winds. Molly was out of her seat and heading toward the fireplace before Arthur had finished reading the note.

It took over an hour to get hold of Dumbledore, it would appear she was not the only one to receive a letter from Hogwarts today. Molly was just getting into her stride in a quite fiery tirade when her suspicions were confirmed. She was interrupted by Amelia Bones entering the headmaster's office, accompanied by Minerva. Molly would have loved to listen in on that conversation but had to settle for warning Albus not to punish her children, they had her permission to boycott potions as long as that man taught the subject.

Albus glanced toward his unexpected guests and wondered how he found himself the target for the ire of all these formidable women. He'd had Augusta Longbottom on the floo before Molly and was now faced by another pair of them, he reached for the dish on his desk. "Lemon drop anyone?"

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The locket version of Tom Riddle awoke and the world didn't look right to him, for starters everything was far too big!

"Wizard is trespassing in noble house of Black, Kreacher is a loyal house elf, you must leave at once."

Tom was totally confused, where was his new body and what the hell was a kreature? It wasn't until he began feeling for a wand and only found a filthy pillowcase that the horrific reality of his situation began to dawn, he was inside the body of a stinking house elf!

"Be gone wizard, you don't belong here!"

'Silence elf, I am the master here. You will do as I command.'

"You is not a Black, Kreacher won't."

Tom realised the root of his problems, the house elf's bond with its family was one of the strongest bonds known in the magical world. Because he wasn't part of that house, the horcrux would be unable to break that bond and use the elf's magic to produce his new body. Tom thought that at least he was amongst his own kind, the Black's were strong supporters of his cause. Perhaps they could help him, 'Take me to your master or mistress.'

Kreacher thought about this and decided mistress would know what he should do, he ambled off toward her.

Tom couldn't even get control of this creature's body, far less its magic. Tom figured that once its master ordered the beast to obey him, he would at least be able to comply with the compulsion charm and apparate to Riddle manor.

Tom was beginning to wonder just how long he'd been away, if the state of this house was anything to go by then the Blacks had fallen on hard times. He received another shock when he found himself standing in front of a portrait of Walburga Black.

Tom was now more certain than ever that this old elf was crazy as a loon.

"Mistress, a wizard has broken into the noble house of Black."

The portrait started screeching, "Show yourself wizard or suffer the wrath of my house elf."

Kreacher took this as a direct order from his mistress and allowed the wizard temporary control so he could speak with his mistress.

Tom tried to stand up straight, not easy in this wizened old body. "Madam Black, I am Lord Voldemort. I command you to release this elf to me."

The volume of the screaming coming from Walburga's portrait increased dramatically. "Who are you to command me in my own house? You who murdered my son and heir. It would appear the Blacks are not the only ones to fall on hard times."

Tom was speechless, he must have killed her son after he created the locket horcrux. When she screamed for Kreacher, he was effectively relegated to the role of spectator once more as the bond with the house of Black reasserted itself. The dark lord was left without any semblance of control.

Walburga used her strongest voice for this command. "Kreacher, it is time to fulfil your destiny as a Black elf. This is my final command to you."

Tom could sense the tears of joy that ran down this creature's filthy cheeks. "Thank you mistress, Kreacher is always happy to obey."

Tom tried to coax the elf into allowing him control again as it shuffled toward the stairs. It would appear to have a specific location in mind, Tom couldn't discern anything though as its joyful emotions were leaving him quite nauseous.

It was a total surprise then when it stopped on one of the stairs and, after a momentary pause, completed a manoeuvre that its frail old body shouldn't be capable of.

Kreacher sprang high into the air before performing a twist that caused a spike sticking out the wall to impale him through the neck and up into his head. Tom felt intense pain as the creature died, ending his life as well.

As black pus ran from the elf's nose and ears, a magical pulse emanated from the manor in warning that another horcrux had met its end

The protruding magical spike not only killed Kreacher instantly, it shrunk his head over the course of the next few hours. The deceased elf's body dropped off before Kreacher's name appeared on the small plaque below his now shrunken head.

Unlike the rest of his mounted ancestors though, his shrunken head wore a wide smile. He'd completed master Regulus's last order and,

in carrying out his mistress's command, he'd gotten revenge on the wizard who'd murdered his beloved master. Revenge was something the Black family understood and Kreacher was a Black family elf. He died a very happy Black family elf.

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Minerva and Amelia were in the head of Gryffindor's office drinking coffee, it was coffee laced with whisky though as both women felt the need for it.

"I can't believe Albus knew what that man did yet let him work with children. Dumbledore has finally lost the plot! Susan will not be taking lessons with Snape ever again, I'm actually tempted to take her home with me right now."

Minerva shared her friend's anger, "I told Albus this would not be swept under the carpet, there is no love lost between the Potter lad and his potions teacher. Harry looks far too much like his father for that cretin ever to accept the boy for who he is. The headmaster has been fending off calls from parents all day, it can't be long before the school board and the press get a hold of this as well. If Albus attempts to protect Snape, it will cost the headmaster his job. Either that or there won't be enough students left in Hogwarts for anyone to teach."

Amelia could only agree, if that man was still teaching here come September, the Bones family would be one of many ending their long association with Hogwarts. At the moment there weren't any charges she could bring against Snape as Dumbledore would block her at every turn. The head of the DMLE was certain if she could get some veritaserum into the death eater, then Snape's new students would be the dementors of Azkaban. She was frustratingly in the exact same position with Malfoy, except it was the idiot minister who was protecting the death eater. Not for the first time she wondered how she was supposed to do her job properly when certain individuals could be placed above the law.

When Amelia left, Minerva noticed it was now dinner time. Knowing Severus as she did, the mere thought of denying her Gryffindors anything would see the man sat at the staff table for the entire time dinner was being served. Minerva headed toward her house common room, thinking perhaps she could get the elves to rustle up

some sandwiches for her charges. Minerva entered the portrait hole and froze at the sight that greeted her there, all the study tables had been pushed together and were overflowing with platters of food. The prefects appeared to have matters well in hand and ensured the youngest got fed first from this sumptuous looking buffet.

All around the common room, groups of students were sitting with plates of food in their laps and treating the whole thing as a well organised picnic. She noticed she was not the only one who froze. Ronald Weasley had a piece of chicken tantalisingly close to his mouth but was apparently awaiting permission to continue, a permission Minerva was delighted to grant.

"Carry on everyone, really well done on organising this. You might want to have a word with the other houses though, so they could organise the same."

As usual, it was Hermione Granger who answered her. "Already done professor, would you care to join us for dinner?"

Hermione received some strange looks from some of her housemates for having the nerve to suggest that, they were all smiles though after McGonagall answered.

"Why thank you Miss Granger, I'd love to." Minerva was immediately handed a plate, after selecting her choices from the buffet, she sat beside some of her fourth years and had a really pleasant meal. She decided to visit the kitchens after this and personally thank the castle elves for taking such good care of the children. She would also ensure that no one could issue orders to stop this practice unless it came with her approval. Only Albus could overrule her on this issue and he wouldn't dare!

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The magical pulse of another destroyed horcrux left lord Voldemort more frightened than at any other time in his life. All his meticulously laid plans were coming apart at the seams and he was powerless to prevent it. Three of his five anchors had now been destroyed yet he still had a passage through the Alps to negotiate. If his two remaining anchors were destroyed before he made it back to Britain then the greatest dark lord in history would be just that, history. Without his anchors to hold him to this world, he would be left with

the choice of passing over or becoming a ghost. This could not be the fate of lord Voldemort, it just couldn't be!

The Potter brat was still a mere boy which also left the mystery of who was doing this. His two remaining horcruxes would now attempt anything in an effort to protect themselves, in fact they might already have. Lord Voldemort realised there was no signal sent if they acquired a new body, just if they were destroyed. This gave him the glimmer of hope he needed that he wouldn't end up haunting someone's bathroom. He still needed to reach Britain and that was going to take a while.

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On a train heading north toward York, a strangely dressed woman wearing jam-jar glasses visibly shuddered and let out a loud gasp as the magical pulse hit her body. She wasn't quite screaming 'yes' at the top of her voice but still managed to clear her compartment of the other passengers.

Sibyll had used the surprise of that pulse to regain control of her body and was now enjoying just sitting on the train, she really needed to get out more. This also served notice to Tom that she was far from helpless, if his concentration slipped then she could push him aside for a while. She'd been so lonely for so long that Sibyll didn't object to the company, but the man was going to have to learn to share. Her hair was a mess as Tom hadn't even brushed it before they left the castle, she was currently using the reflection off the train window to correct her appearance. She could feel Tom trying to assert control again but she wasn't quite ready to give it back to him yet.

Sibyll was actually enjoying her adventure outside the castle, even if she was only looking out the window of a moving train. At least it was moving which was more than she had done in many years. Tom would just have to wait his turn.

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A ring and a cup also felt the pulse and were attempting to entice anyone to activate them. Their biggest problem though being that neither were in locations that made their task easy. Perhaps this wasn't as well thought out a scheme as it should have been.

Thanks for reading.

Chapter 4

The atmosphere in the Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff common rooms was almost party-like as everyone banded together in their display of disdain for one Severus Snape, that there was bountiful and beautiful food readily available certainly helped. The atmosphere, or lack of one, in the great hall was definitely buried deeply at the opposite end of the scale. People were checking the banners hadn't turned black because it sure felt like a wake.

Three of the four house tables were deserted while the Slytherins appeared as if they would rather be anywhere else but here, all were afraid to say anything though. The staff table was no better, Dumbledore was in the centre while Snape was in his usual seat near the end. All other positions were unoccupied. Apart from the normal noises of people eating, the hall was as silent as a graveyard.

Albus sat watching as his school was dying right before his very eyes, he would have to take action soon before this became terminal. Doing nothing but watch and hope the school underwent a miraculous recovery was not an option, the movement had far too much momentum for that. It was quickly becoming an avalanche that threatened Hogwarts very existence, as headmaster he could not allow that to occur.

He reckoned that tomorrow would bring it to a head, for the sake of Hogwarts he was going to have to make a decision Albus really didn't want to. The old wizard hoped this wasn't a harbinger for things to come, he would also have to speak again with Mr Potter soon. He really should include Miss Granger in that conversation, the girl would probably show up with him anyway!

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After a Slytherin only breakfast in the great hall, Severus was then faced with a Slytherin's only potions class as none of the other students attended. The tension built throughout the period and actually saw the potion's professor shouting at members of his own house. When the next set of students appeared and they were all wearing green trim on their robes, Snape snapped.

He headed at speed for the headmaster's room to vociferously air his grievances. It wasn't that he minded the Slytherin only classes,

he just wanted to ensure the rest received suitable punishment for deliberately skipping his classes.

With his robes billowing behind him, Snape burst into Dumbledore's office. "Headmaster, I demand you take serious action against the students deliberately skipping potions. Just who is running this school, you or the students?"

Albus ignored the last remark and addressed the first point, "Severus, there are no students deliberately skipping your classes."

This was like waving a red rag at a very angry bull. "If that is the case then how do you explain only Slytherins attending my first two lessons?"

Albus let out a weary sigh, "Severus, please sit down and I shall endeavour to explain."

Severus really didn't want to sit down but took the offered chair before Albus continued. "The reason that no student skipped your classes today is that they have all been withdrawn from potions by their parents."

Snape was back on his feet, his face the colour of the aforementioned rag. "This is preposterous, they're trying to force me out of Hogwarts! To hell with the lot of them, they'll soon come around when they realise their precious little brats need potions qualifications for their careers. I think we should let them all stew for now."

Albus could hardly look at Severus, "The parents are apparently well aware of the importance of potions to their children's education. Instead of 'stewing', most are busily searching for other educational establishments. I have already received a number of requests regarding students transferring to other schools and that number is rapidly growing. It will soon reach the point where the fees generated would not cover the running costs of Hogwarts. If it reaches that point and I have taken no action, the board will sack me directly before they then send for you. As headmaster, I cannot allow any one individual to become more important than Hogwarts."

Severus wanted to rant, rave and wreck this office. That would hardly help his case here though so settled for wearing his class one scowl as Albus delivered the blow he knew was coming.

"I'm sorry Severus, I have no other recourse but to let you go at the end of term."

"Don't you mean I'm sacked?"

Albus hadn't expected the venom in that last comment, "Your contract will not be renewed in September. You are free of course to view this action in whatever way you wish. I would like to thank you for your long and faithful service to Hogwarts."

Severus knew a dismissal when he heard one, this one dismissed him from more than this room. He walked out the office, contemplating what he would do with his life now. His anger didn't even have its regular outlets for letting off steam, all the students he could have screamed at were refusing to go to his classes.

With that particular bit of unpleasantness over Albus could put the finishing touches to his arrangements for ensuring the Potter boy was in the castle come the first of September. Anything else would be unthinkable so he had to get this right.

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It was a few days later before the Snape story broke in the Prophet, to a massive public outcry that demanded justice. Harry and Hermione soon found themselves summoned to the headmaster's office. Thankfully there was no need to inform their head of house, McGonagall had been invited along.

"Professor, do you have any idea what this is about?"

Minerva shook her head, "As usual Miss Granger, the headmaster plays his cards close to his chest. I only know he requires the three of us, nothing more."

Albus noticed the anxious faces as they entered and hoped they'd be smiling by the time they left. After the normal greetings and getting everyone seated, Albus began his sales pitch to protect the future of magical Britain.

"Mr Potter and Miss Granger, our last meeting here ended rather poorly. It is my intention here today to begin repairing some of the unintentional hurt I've caused Mr Potter. I am aware that actions speak louder than words but would like your assurance that what we say today can be held in confidence until I get time to officially announce some of the items I will mention."

Both Harry and Hermione figured they had nothing to lose so agreed.

Dumbledore had three pieces of good news for them, so began with the biggest obstacle to the pair returning to Hogwarts after the summer. "Severus Snape will not be getting his contract renewed for next term. I hope you will keep this to yourselves until the official announcement can be made. I promise it will be soon."

Both glanced at each other before noticing it appeared this was news to McGonagall as well.

For his next trick, Albus handed both of them a small card. "After your valiant efforts to save the school yet again, I thought these would be more appreciated than a special award from the school. These licences exempt you from the restrictions of performing underage magic, though the normal rules of the secrecy act still apply."

Harry understood immediately what a massive thing this was for Hermione, her parents would be able to see her performing magic for the first time. Since she'd recovered from being petrified and he'd that piece of Tom flushed out his head, they appeared to understand each other better and grown closer than ever. He knew Hermione would normally have been spinning around the room like a cartoon Tasmanian devil at that news, she was stoically holding herself in check until she discovered what Dumbledore wanted for this 'gift'. They would have to wait and see what price they had to pay before becoming excited, that price might be too high.

Albus was beginning to get anxious at their lack of reaction, he really had went to a lot of trouble with this and was paying for the next bit out his own pocket. If this didn't work, he had no plan B!

"I can also guarantee that next year's defence professor is more than capable for the job. To prove this to you both, and in light of the

prophecy, I have asked him to provide you both with extra lessons over the summer at Miss Granger's home."

Harry was so impressed, his studious best friend had just been offered extra lessons yet outwardly portrayed no visible sign that she was willing to accept this. Dumbledore must be going nuts attempting to figure out what they were up to.

"Harry, the wizard in question was a close personal friend of both your parents. Remus was in the same dorm as your father and the Gryffindor prefect along with your mother, he's really looking forward to meeting you. I understand Miss Granger will have to write to her parents and ask if this is permissible. If that could be done before the end of term, I would be very grateful."

Hermione took her time before answering, her heart was racing from sheer excitement and she was battling desperately not to show it.

"Headmaster, if this is a reward then I think the underage licence should definitely apply to Ron, and possibly Ginny as well. They should also be included in the lessons too, once I contact my parents we could set up a schedule. There is also the possibility of holding some of them at the Burrow, that way Mrs Weasley might feel better about them."

Albus was amazed at the girl's insightfulness, giving him an opportunity to placate Molly Weasley into the bargain. If the exams hadn't been cancelled, there was no doubt in the headmaster's mind that Miss Granger would shatter the academic record for second year as she did last time.

"Those are two outstanding ideas Miss Granger! Can I once more impose on you both not to mention this? I need to discuss the details with the Weasley parents before being able to confirm this. They may not like the idea of their two youngest being able to perform magic while their elder brothers can't. Is this acceptable to you both?" there was the faintest hint of pleading in the old wizard's voice.

It was Harry who answered this time, "Professor, we appreciate you recognising that you made some pretty big mistakes with me and are trying to make amends. Please don't think this buys you our forgiveness, at best it buys you another chance."

Albus understood these two were smart but didn't think they would see right through his 'bribe' so easily. "Thank you both, that is the best I can hope for at the moment. I will endeavour to make the best of this chance and hope we can move forward from there."

When both students had left, Minerva couldn't resist a dig at the headmaster. "You underestimated them again Albus, and they saw right through you. It was a nice gesture that will probably keep them at Hogwarts next term, providing you don't mess them around again. Miss Granger is one of the smartest witches I have ever taught and Mr Potter one of the most powerful, with Mr Weasley you have a trio of friends that have now saved the school twice! Treat them like the outstanding young people that they are and you'll be fine, start messing with them again and they'll be off to another school. Taking quite a few of their friends with them I would bet."

It was a thoughtful headmaster who watched his deputy leave his office. Minerva had given him good advice, for once he intended to follow it.

The pair managed the bottom of the spiral staircase before Hermione's containment field shattered and her exuberance exploded outward, all over Harry. With a squeee she shot into Harry's arms and was almost bouncing with excitement. "Oh Harry, just think! We'll be able to perform magic and get extra defence lessons over the holidays. This is going to be my best summer ever. Can I borrow Hedwig?" Hermione didn't wait for an answer before giving him an even tighter squeeze and kissing him on the lips.

"I'll go write that letter right now, it should be there when they finish work. Oh Harry, this is beyond brilliant!"

She released Harry and careered off down the corridor at speed to write her letter.

Harry was still standing there like an extra gargoyle guard when McGonagall came down. "Is everything alright Mr Potter?"

Harry just kept replaying that kiss over and over in his head, "Oh yes professor, everything is beyond brilliant!" He made his way back to the common room at a slower pace than Hermione had.

Hermione was already writing her letter when it finally struck her what she'd done, she'd kissed Harry! She quickly added a final line about looking forward to being able to chat with her mum when she got home, she would know what her daughter meant and take the first opportunity for a private chat. Hermione Granger had kissed Harry Potter! Not only that, she wanted to do it again and again and again.

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Dan Granger was distinctly unhappy as his wife read aloud the latest note from their daughter. He made no attempt to hide his displeasure from Emma.

"Extra lessons during the summer? Don't tell me this boy is so thick he needs summer school just to keep up. I thought our Hermione had better taste than that? I understand that opposites can attract but surely she could find a friend that wasn't poor and stupid to boot!"

Emma was so enraged, she let slip a piece of information the Granger girls had been deliberately keeping from Dan, "The reason he's getting extra lessons in defence is because he's famous, Hermione tells me he's probably the most famous person in the wizarding world. He's even written about in books!" for the studious Grangers, this was the ultimate accolade.

Dan was more than a little sceptical, "And just what is this skinny kid famous for?"

Emma tried to explain as best she could, "There was this really evil wizard who was killing everyone that didn't agree with him. He murdered both Harry's parents when the boy was just a toddler. When he tried to do the same to Harry, the curse bounced back off baby Harry and ended the evil wizard. This had never happened before or since so Harry is known as the boy who lived in their society."

Dan was beyond angry now, the sarcasm dripping of his words. "And just who wrote these books, the Brothers Grimm? The more I hear about these people, the more I'm convinced we're mixing with nutters!"

Emma's whole temperament turned glacial as she rounded on her husband. "It might have escaped your notice but 'these people' now include your daughter. She's a witch and there's nothing that can be done to change that, I will not stand here and listen to you calling my little girl some nutter! She believes the story, it's how the boy got that scar. Your daughter is best friend's with the most famous person in the magical community yet all you see is the poor boy's shoddy clothes. Your pigheadedness is making me wonder if I should have listened to my parents all those years ago. You alienate our daughter from us with your attitude and you can move into the spare room, permanently!"

Dan was beginning to understand he'd overstepped the mark, they'd been married sixteen years and this was the first time his wife had ever used that threat. It was also blatantly obvious it was no idle threat either, he'd never seen his wife this angry. It was time to backtrack, and fast.

"I'm sorry honey. You know I only want the best for our princess, I would never do anything to hurt her. So her little friend's famous is he? Well being famous isn't so bad. At least it's a start, I promise I'll be on my best behaviour and at least we might see what she's being taught at this school."

Both Emma and Hermione were afraid of this reaction, if the boy happened to have money as well as fame, her husband would have them engaged before the end of the summer. Judging from the last bit of her daughter's latest note, Hermione might actually thank her father for that. Emma definitely wouldn't be letting her husband read that part. She knew he loved his daughter dearly and meant well but Emma could see this whole thing ending in tears.

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Minerva would normally be tearing her hair out if three teachers left before the end of term, but not this time. Sibyll had never taught the students anything and Minerva was still celebrating her departure, while that faker Lockheart had taught the students nothing all year. Severus had not technically left yet but since three quarters of the school had stopped attending his classes he might as well have. Now if only she could get Binns to pass over, maybe they could once more have a school to be proud of.

Minerva was delighted that Remus had accepted the defence position. Albus paying him for the summer would also provide him with some much needed income before he officially began teaching in Hogwarts. Minerva didn't want the poor man turning up for work in shabby robes, first impressions could be so important when dealing with teenagers.

Albus appeared fixated on having Horace Slughorn return to teach potions and take over as head of Slytherin. She would not oppose that decision though couldn't see the wizard in question giving up his retirement. Horace had always left Minerva feeling slightly uneasy, it was human nature for a teacher to have favourites amongst their students. She considered it extremely unprofessional though to broadcast that fact. His infamous 'slug club' just rubbed her deep rooted Scottish sensibilities of equality up the wrong way. Minerva decided to quietly contact someone who might be interested in the potion's post in case the headmaster's plans fell through, the head of Slytherin could go to a more experienced member of staff.

Only a moron would take someone with no teaching experience and make them a head of house at the same time. Minerva had fought long and hard over the appointment of Severus Snape. She was all for giving the young man the chance to see if he could teach potions as well as he brewed them. In her opinion, taking a young man only a few years out of Hogwarts and making him a member of the senior staff had been a disaster right from the start.

Only the total and unwavering support of the headmaster had kept Severus in that position. Once that support was lost, the resulting dismissal was inevitable. With competent teachers of defence, potions and divination being removed from the syllabus, Minerva found herself looking forward to a new term with more enthusiasm than she had for many years.

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Frank Bryce couldn't remember what enthusiasm was, it had been so long since he'd had any. Even going down to the pub for a pint and a bit of lunch was now a bit of a chore, he should really have stopped going years ago. The only reason he still went was some foolish notion of pride. The locals in the bar didn't want him there, Frank refused to give the bastards the satisfaction of thinking they were responsible for him no longer going.

The trek back up to his cottage was rapidly becoming too much for the former soldier, the shrapnel imbedded in his leg all those years ago was reducing his mobility more as old age worked its particular form of magic.

Long gone was the young soldier who thought he was indestructible, his training had left Frank feeling he was untouchable and on top of the world. His first foray into combat had soon quenched those thoughts, the shell that earned him his pittance of a disability pension put paid to the military career he'd been dreaming of. Frank had come home to lick his wounds and recover from being tossed onto the scrapheap of life at such a young age. He remembered being pleased on discovering that his old job was still available, fate must have been pissing herself laughing at him.

Discovering those three bodies inside his employer's manor so soon after returning to the village was the final kick in the teeth for Frank Bryce. He was the gardener who'd so recently returned from war, he might as well have had 'I did it' stamped on his forehead. The police couldn't prove he did it, though not from lack of effort on their part – the bastards! Everyone in the village and surrounding countryside also believed he murdered those three people, nothing was ever going to change that.

The whispering had begun before the incident even happened, 'war changes a man' and 'not the same since he came back'. Of course he wasn't the bloody same, who would be? Like any young man, Frank had dreams of a wife and family. Those dreams remained just that as the reality of his new situation began to make itself known.

Frank had neither the education, experience, references or finances available to move away from his current position, yet no local girl would come anywhere near the man who got away with murder. He was trapped in his gardener/caretaker role that provided him with a home and a salary from the Riddle estate to look after the place. This was not the future he imagined for himself when he had first proudly worn his country's uniform and set off to war. All these years later and, to everyone in a twenty mile radius, he was still the crazy old man who had murdered the Riddles and got away with it.

He was disturbed from his mental musings by the sight of a dilapidated cottage, there was the shrivelled body of a dead snake

nailed to the door. In all the years he'd lived here Frank had never laid eyes on this place, he was sure he would have remembered seeing this before. Come to think of it, he never came home this way either. Something inside the cottage seemed to call out to Frank and he already knew he was going in there for a look. He wasn't in the slightest bit worried. As far as the old soldier was concerned, Frank Bryce didn't have much of a life to lose.

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Albus had another problem, how to get the information about Severus Snape's imminent departure from Hogwarts to everyone who needed to hear it. Normally he would just make an announcement at dinner and the rest would take care of itself. Since three quarters of the students wouldn't be there, this was the crux of the headmaster's problem. The very students who needed to know would be the ones who would be missing. His idea of calling a whole school assembly had the potential to backfire on him if the whole school didn't attend, he would be forced to punish those students he was trying to placate.

Thus Albus found himself standing before a great hall containing only Slytherin students and one professor. He now thought this way might actually be better, at least Severus would be able to leave with some dignity. "It saddens me greatly to announce that yet another professor is leaving our Hogwarts family. Professor Snape has made the decision that his future lies outwith these walls and will therefore not be returning to us next year. I'm sure you'll join me in not only thanking him for his years of dedication to Hogwarts, but wishing him well for the future."

Albus led the polite applause that eventually came from the Slytherin table while Severus sat there without moving a single facial muscle from his trademark scowl. The headmaster hated to think what the reaction would have been if he'd made that announcement to a packed hall. He could easily envisage redheaded twins dancing on the Gryffindor table, Minerva would seem more inclined to join them than issue reprimands over this matter.

The ghosts and portraits would soon see that news spread to the other three houses, gossip was one of the few pleasures left open to them. He would have a delicate word with Minerva about curbing the elves support for those boycotting the great hall at meal times.

Sandwiches and juice could still be served in their houses but, if they wanted a proper hot meal, they really needed to use the facilities the castle provided. Their boycott had gained them the required result, it was time they learned to be magnanimous in victory. Albus saw being able to teach the students how to forgive as being one of their main tasks as educators.

The headmaster tried hard not to imagine the leaving feast if three quarters of the school's students, and most of the staff, refused to participate. This would be especially galling as he once again planned to distribute some last minute house points. A lot of students were feeling guilty with their behaviour over the whole 'Heir of Slytherin' fiasco, Albus thought that was one of the reasons this boycott received such support. They'd let one of their own down badly this year yet here they were being given the chance to publicly atone. Only the Slytherins would complain at Gryffindor snatching the house cup again this year.

They had been shoo-ins to win the Quidditch cup as well until that last game had to be cancelled and it was a pity there was no time left to reschedule the game, Albus couldn't think of many better ways to ingratiate himself with Minerva and the Potter lad than giving them the opportunity to win the Quidditch cup.

-oOoOo-

Harry and Hermione were busy trying to act like that kiss earlier hadn't changed anything between them when a joyful Ron and Ginny came racing toward the couple, "Have you heard the rumours about Snape? Do you think it's true?"

Both shared a glance at Ron's news that Ginny immediately picked up on, "Did you two already know? If you did, why didn't you tell us?"

It was Harry who answered, "The rumour's true Ginny, we found out earlier today. We were told not to tell anyone until an official announcement could be made, we both figured that would be tomorrow at the very latest."

They could see Ron was hurt by this, "Oh, so now we're classes as anyone mate? Thanks very much!"

Hermione wasn't used to playing the part of peacemaker but she didn't want to see this developing into an argument. "Look Ron, we're sorry! There were some other things discussed today that we're dying to tell you about but Dumbledore needs to contact your parents first for permission. All I can say is that it concerns the summer and is very exciting."

Ron studied his best female friend for a moment before replying, "Hermione, the only thing I can think of that would get you this excited is extra lessons over the holidays. Please, please tell me I'm wrong."

Hermione's face blushed bright red while Harry couldn't contain his laughter.

Ginny was puzzled, "The thought of extra lessons during the holidays really has you that excited?"

Hermione was now getting upset, "It's not just the extra lessons, my parents have never seen me perform magic before."

Ron's brows furrowed as it was his turn to be puzzled, he went through the trio's normal ritual of thinking out loud when problem solving. "Even with the extra lessons, you still wouldn't be able to do magic unless..."

The other three could see he'd worked it out and, as Ginny was closer, she clamped her hand over her brother's mouth in payback.

"Ron, this is obviously something Harry and Hermione don't want becoming public knowledge. Could you please not shout it out loud so everyone can hear?"

He was now nodding eagerly while his eyes were once more sparkling from excitement. As Ginny removed her hand, Ron couldn't contain his jubilation. "Do you realise what this means Ginny? The twins wouldn't be able to prank us all summer if we can do magic and they can't"

Hermione was now shaking her head, "This is why we were ordered not to tell you, it needs parental permission for this to happen. The headmaster is worried your mum might say no for that very reason,

she wouldn't want the two youngest being able to do magic while others couldn't."

Ron felt as if the Quidditch cup had been snatched out his hands and handed to Slytherin, Ginny also appeared worried her parents would refuse permission. "Would mum and dad really stop us getting extra lessons over the summer?"

Ron's mood improved, "Ginny, you're a genius! We play up the educational angle and say we're desperate to learn, mum won't say no to that. By the way, what are the extra lessons?"

With a totally deadpan expression Hermione replied, "History of Magic!"

Ron's face was such a picture of horror that the other three were laughing before he realised he'd been pranked by Miss prim and proper Granger. Hanging out with him and Harry was good for her.

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That evening at the Burrow, Molly and Arthur had just finished dinner so now it was decision time. Before that though the head of the Weasley family had a question for his wife. "Molly, why are you so keen on this idea? I was sure you would be totally opposed to the children performing magic during the holidays."

Molly's slight blush wasn't missed by her husband, "Well it would be good for them, from an educational point of view. It will also help Ginny if she's around friends during the summer, instead of stuck here with her brothers."

Arthur was beginning to see what his wife was up to, "By friends, I'm assuming you mean Harry?"

Molly's blush deepened at being caught so easily. "Well Arthur, he's such a nice boy. Ginny really enjoyed him staying here for part of the summer last year."

Arthur was trying not to chuckle at that, "Really enjoyed? I don't think our daughter said two words to him the whole time he was here. This wouldn't have anything to do with the lad staying with his other friend, the Granger girl, would it?"

Molly's complexion was now as red as any apple that came from their orchard. A blind man could have seen that their little Ginny was smitten with the Potter lad, Arthur didn't miss much when it concerned his family. "Molly, our Ginny will be twelve on her birthday while the Potter boy is just about to become a teenager. They're way too young to be anything other than friends so I don't want you interfering here."

Molly attempted to appear hurt but couldn't quite manage it, the embarrassment of being so easily read by her husband was the main emotion displayed on her face. "I am quite aware of our children's ages, I'm also sure we're both well aware our daughter is infatuated with this lad. All I'm doing here is providing some opportunities for them to get to know one another, friendship has to come before anything else can develop. Look at the effect having those two as friends has had on our Ronald, I was very proud of him when he went to rescue Harry from those awful relatives last year. Now he helped rescue his sister, he's turning into a fine young wizard who's already making his mark in our world. His two friends have played a big part in that change and I want the same for Ginny. I won't lie and say I wouldn't be delighted if, later on, Harry and Ginny became more than friends. Every mother in the country with a daughter is hoping for the same thing, he's such a fine young man."

Arthur could only nod in agreement, most of the father's of witches would be doing the same. That would be until they got to know the lad, then they would be reaching for the betrothal contracts. The Weasleys would never have anything to do with those things while Arthur was head of the family. "Ok Molly, I have no problem with Ginny becoming their friend. Do not interfere further than that, those three are already very tight. It will be hard enough for Ginny to find her place in the group without you trying to push Harry and Ginny together. You could see Harry and Hermione turning away from her and I would hate to see Ron being forced to choose. The poor boy would be in a no-win situation, I will not stand for that Molly!"

When her husband used that tone Molly was left in no doubt that the decision had been made. It also made her weak at the knees when Arthur used his 'head of house' voice. She would pen a quick note to the kids and Albus, before hopefully having an early night.

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Severus Snape had effectively been neutered, he was out of a job and had no release for his frustrations. The very students he wanted to strangle he was banned from going anywhere near, they were also the very students responsible for getting him sacked. Albus could dress it up any way he liked but he was being sacked.

His options now were severely limited, the article in the Prophet left him practically unemployable in Britain and his savings wouldn't take him far. He was one of the few people who understood there was an absolute fortune lying right below his feet, just waiting on the right person to pick it up. Severus had no doubt he should be that person, the basilisk carcass would easily provide him with enough capital to open his own apothecary. He didn't believe for one second the grossly exaggerated account of the size of the beast. After all, Potter had killed it with a sword so how big could it be? It was time to visit Albus and see if that pet pigeon of his would take them down to the chamber.

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Tom arrived in Little Hangleton after having to take two busses since leaving the train. It was now pitch dark and he wasn't sure he could even find the mansion at the moment, the bitch was back and nagging about her nightcap. Tom also didn't know if there would be anyone else already there, the jolt from the other horcrux being destroyed now had him exceedingly jumpy. He figured that anyone who got there before him would be feeling the same, he didn't want to come across them in the dark with nothing more than an empty sherry bottle in his hand.

At the mention of sherry, Sibyll perked up. Tom was going to be forced to book in for bed and breakfast at the local pub, he also knew he was going to be forced to sit at the bar and have a few drinks or he would never be allowed to sleep tonight. He just hoped the village mentality would see the locals giving the stranger a wide berth, they didn't come any stranger than Sibyll Trelawney! Tom really needed to get himself some kind of weapon. Somehow hitting a man with your handbag didn't seem an appropriate punishment for a muggle daring to lay their hands on the dark lord.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 5

Harry and Hermione once more fond themselves being escorted to the headmaster's office by their head of house. All three were again unaware why their presence was required.

On entering, Hermione understood at once why she was there. Her job was to prevent Harry attacking Snape.

Minerva was far from amused and made no attempt to hide her displeasure at the old man's manipulations. "Albus, just what are you playing at here?"

Dumbledore hadn't missed the young girl's hand gripping Mr Potter's wand arm firmly the second she spied Severus. That was not a good sign for what he wanted to accomplish here. "If everyone could relax for a moment I will explain. There is currently a small fortune in potions ingredients lying decomposing under this castle, letting this resource just rot away is in no one's best interests. If we can all work together on this then we can all benefit. This in no way affects anything else that has previously been discussed inside this office."

Harry was barely containing his rage though Hermione was already a few steps ahead in where this conversation was heading. "Sir, since Harry's latest trip to the infirmary, we're not sure whether he's a parselmouth anymore. Can I assume Snape's here because of his ability to teach even Draco Malfoy how to conjure a snake?"

Minerva almost broke into a smile at that, it would appear Miss Granger was through blindly respecting authority figures.

Snape was also fighting to control his temper, Albus had instructed him to say nothing unless asked a direct question. Only the thought of all that gold kept him quiet, it didn't stop him conjuring a large snake into the middle of the office though.

That the snake was staring directly at Hermione saw Harry reacting instantly, {Attack the person behind you dressed in black, I will reward you!}

The snake gave no outward sign of understanding Harry while the sound of parseltongue being spoken had the others staring in awe. The snake used this pause to, all in one fluid motion, turn and

launch itself at Snape. It would surely have reached its target had not Dumbledore been lightning quick with his wand to banish the snake back from whence it came.

An even paler Snape was about to demand the expulsion of the Potter brat but Hermione interrupted as if he was of no consequence. All now noticed both her hands were around Harry's forearms as he appeared ready to emulate the snake and spring at Severus. "Now that Harry has ably demonstrated that his parselmouth abilities remain, how do we proceed?"

Albus had his best caring grandfather voice in use, "Harry, was it really necessary for that snake to attack someone?"

Hermione quickly countered, "Was it really necessary to have a poisonous snake in the middle of this office? I'm sure Harry was just telling it not to attack us."

Harry's voice was cold enough to give molten lava frostbite, "I told the snake to attack that bastard. He set a cowardly reptile on my family, turn around is fair play. Any deal you have that involves him I want no part of. The chamber of secrets is a dangerous place and I wouldn't trust him behind me." Hermione now had her two arms around Harry, hugging him from behind.

Minerva broke her silence at this point, "I think Mr Potter is being perfectly reasonable. If we wanted to use some specialist knowledge after the carcass was brought to the surface, would that be acceptable?" it was toward Harry and Hermione the question was directed.

Harry gave his unequivocal answer, "I would rather it lay down in the chamber and rot than see this man make a Knut from it."

Seeing his dreams of gold crashing down and noticing that Minerva as well as Albus had their wands in their hands, Severus stormed out the office.

If anything, Harry's features now hardened as he faced Dumbledore. "As I killed the creature, what's to stop me bringing in my own team and claiming the carcass?"

It was now clear to Albus he had grossly underestimated the animosity between both Harry and Severus. He had thought that, since Severus was now leaving, they could work together one last time. He had so badly wanted to assist Severus that, when Fawkes refused to take them both down there, he was left with only one other option. Miss Granger's presence was the only thing that saved him and Minerva having to break up a fight. "You are of course correct Mr Potter. Since the carcass is inside Hogwarts though, I feel the school should benefit from this windfall. Don't you?"

Harry considered his options for a moment before replying, "Hermione was the one who discovered it was a basilisk, Ron was down there with me and Ginny should be compensated for her ordeal. I suggest five equal shares of twenty percent with one of them going to Hogwarts."

Albus had intended Harry would receive a finder's fee of about ten percent and be happy with that. He was now contemplating how much his mistake with Severus was going to cost the school. "Isn't that a bit stingy toward Hogwarts Harry?"

"You're actually complaining about the amount of gold I'm giving to a school where everyone thought I was evil and shunned me for months? Hogwarts supplied me with the sword, which is the only reason I'm making this offer."

The argument was settled when the sorting hat spoke from its shelf. "Hogwarts accepts your generous offer Mr Potter, since Fawkes refused to take the headmaster and his friend back down to the chamber, that really is a most generous offer."

Albus had the decency to blush at being caught.

The hat continued, "Mr Potter I have to admit I was wrong about you. I thought you needed to be in Slytherin to make you great, you're managing that just fine on your own."

Harry answered the hat while glancing at the young witch who now had her arm intertwined with his. "Thank you for that but I can assure you, I'm not on my own."

Harry then turned to his head of house, totally ignoring Dumbledore. "Professor McGonagall, what some people are failing to consider is

that we are talking about a beast that could fill this office at least twice over. If the ingredients obtained are as precious as you seem to think, then Hogwarts should do quite well out of this. Thinking back to when the headmaster was sacked and the school was about to be closed, I think this is a very generous offer, no matter what others may say." Harry's tone clearly indicated one word of protest from someone with a long white beard would see the offer vanish.

Harry then delivered one final insult, "Professor McGonagall, we know you would never cheat us, the same can't be said for some of your colleges. I hope you will understand then when I say I want others outside Hogwarts to handle this for me."

Dumbledore's expression implied his beard had been inhabited by farting fairies as both students left his office, it didn't improve as Minerva rounded on him after they had gone.

Minerva was shaking her head at him, "Albus, how can you be so brilliant and yet so bloody stupid? Those two would rather see the castle needing fumigated from the stench of the rotting carcass than see that man profit from it. They were prepared to go without food rather than be in the same room as him yet you expected them to work together? I'm too angry at the moment to even discuss the fact you were contemplating stealing from that boy, were you just going to give him some token payment and expect him to be happy with that?"

Albus ignored the amazingly accurate last comment and focused on trying to answer Minerva's other comments. "Since Severus is leaving, I thought they would be ok with this. I feel really bad after being forced to dismiss him, I was hoping that the gold might help him in his search for new employment."

"And I was hoping there was some chance for you, instead you prove yet again that you're an educated idiot! Any gains you made with those students from our last meeting have just been washed away over your obsession with the welfare of Severus Snape. Don't think for one minute I've forgotten you were both trying to steal from a child, is it any wonder Fawkes refused you both. I hope you think this was worth it Albus because I sure as hell don't."

Hermione had once more stopped Harry at the bottom of the headmaster's revolving stairs, "Oh Harry, I'm so proud of you!"

"Eh thanks Hermione, I thought I was going to get shouted at for losing my temper in there."

"Harry, I wanted to attack that creep myself. I can only imagine how you were feeling. I also want to thank you for thinking of everyone else in there." She slowly came toward him and kissed Harry again, this time she did not run away at the end but took his hand. They walked together back to the common room like this, when Harry squeezed her hand, she returned the slight squeeze with a large smile on her face. No words were needed yet, they would be spending the entire summer together so there would be plenty of time for that. Hermione couldn't wait to talk with her mother.

Harry was glad of the silence as he tried to get his thoughts in order, Hermione had kissed him again and it was even better this time. Walking along the corridor holding her hand was wonderful and he had the whole summer to look forward to more of this. He now couldn't wait until it was time to take the express away from Hogwarts, he never thought he would ever think that.

Harry was well aware the Weasleys were not a wealthy family, yet they had taken him into their home and treated him far better than his own relatives did. He decided not to tell Ron and Ginny about the gold just yet, it would be a great surprise for them. He hoped Hagrid was back soon, he couldn't think of anyone else to ask how to go about getting a bloody great snake cut up and sold.

If it made them enough gold, Harry intended to arrange for his biggest friend to go and see Norbet. After Azkaban, Hagrid could probably do with a holiday.

-oOoOo-

Tom was also taking a slight holiday, he found it easier to concede control on occasion rather than endure the woman's constant whining, it also meant he didn't have to wash this disgusting body in the shower. Tom understood that as a spirit residing at the back of someone's mind, it was impossible for him to physically shudder with revulsion, didn't mean that he couldn't think it though.

He was slowly and reluctantly coming to an understanding with his host that was beneficial to both of them, this was just one of those

instances. Had he retained control and forced the issue, he would have to suffer her constant complaining for the rest of the day that he hadn't fixed her hair properly. By allowing her this and breakfast, he would have control until it was time for her nightcaps. He was so thankful that the locals in the bar last night gave him a wide berth, he also noticed that his control slipped when the body ingested alcohol. This was another reason he had consented to the arrangement, fighting it wasn't worth the effort.

After breakfast he would have to make his way to Riddle manor, he also decided that whatever knife they ate breakfast with would be coming with them. Amorous inebriated locals were one thing but he had no way of knowing what or who was waiting on him at the manor. With no wand he would have to do the best he could with what he had. Considering what he had triggered the impossible shudder again, he couldn't see this body being much use to him in any kind of fight.

-oOoOo-

Riddle awoke to pain, his entire left leg felt as if it was on fire. When he attempted to rise from the awkward position he found himself lying in, Riddle struggled to achieve this simple aim. It was as if his new body was fighting against him but that should not have been possible. He received his first clue things had not went as planned when he noticed his hands, they were old and wrinkled. This body wasn't so much fighting against him as falling apart from old age.

Neither could he feel any magic in this body, his would normally fizzle around his body like a well trained beast awaiting his command. A quick search of this body found no wand as his conclusions were beginning to point in a terrifying direction, no magic in the host would mean no new body for him. He would appear to be inhabiting the old body of a squib, or worst still a muggle!

'Excuse me sir, but if you're looking for a weapon then perhaps I can help.'

Riddle would have jumped in surprise but the reactions of this old body were so slow he was back under control before it could move. 'Who the hell are you?'

'Sergeant Frank Bryce, Retired. I have a little something left over from the war in my cottage that might be able to help you. It may be old but I have looked after it and it should put a hole in anyone who gets too close. It doesn't have great range but then again, we can't see too far anyway!'

Riddle was well used to dealing with subordinates and this Bryce character had immediately fell into that role. He would be stupid to dismiss this offered assistance, with this body and no magic, he would need all the assistance he could get. Ranting and raving about the injustices heaped upon his person wouldn't do any good. He had a task that was of the utmost urgency, perhaps this Bryce could help?

'I need to travel to Riddle manor in Little Hangleton, do you know of it and how long would it take us to get there?'

'I should hope so, I've been looking after the place for most of my life. It's less than a fifteen minute walk from here. Were you related to the Riddles?'

'Not by choice, I have to go there and wait for some others to appear. What sort of condition is the place in?'

'Well it's just about habitable, providing you're not looking for too much comfort.'

'Comfort is irrelevant at this point. If your cottage is nearby, we should go there first and collect this weapon.'

'Yes sir, I'll show you the way.'

Riddle was far more concerned with this age ravaged body than having some stranger talking to him inside his head, this Bryce appeared to know how to follow orders so they should get along just fine.

Frank was not only pleased to have someone to talk with, this person appeared to have some goals in life. This was more than Frank had since he returned wounded from France, he had no problems sitting back and letting someone else take over his body. It's not as if he was doing anything with it anyway.

-oOoOo-

Harry didn't want to go anywhere near the great hall but was getting quite sick of sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner. The rest of the school had taken the reasonable view that they had won the argument so returned to the hall for meals, with Harry it was personal. Hermione, Ginny and Ron still backed his stand, though Ron appeared even less chuffed with the latest round of sandwiches than Harry did. Harry suddenly had an idea, something that Dobby had said to him beforehand was niggling at the back of his brain so he called for the little guy. "Dobby, you said that the elves were now only allowed to serve sandwiches in the common rooms. Does this mean if we went somewhere else, you would be able to serve us normal food?"

Dobby was jumping up and down from excitement, "Harry Potter is indeed being a great wizard. The elves are not being allowed to tell you that. Should you ask, Dobby then of course must tell you the truth. If Harry Potter and his friends would like a hot meal, Dobby knows the perfect place. It is called the come and go room."

-oOoOo-

Tom entered the room as quietly as he possibly could, he was gradually making his way through the manor. His weapon was held out in front of him though what he was going to do with that weapon was debatable. Unless his adversary had some toast that required buttering, Tom's weapon was pretty useless.

He suddenly froze as the cold, hard cylinder pressed into the back of his neck, "Drop the knife on the floor, I feel insulted that's the best you could come up with."

Tom recognised his own brand of sarcasm in that remark, he still dropped the knife though. "Hey, I was pressed for time. For some reason, I don't think that's a wand you're poking into me either. I was compelled to come here as quickly as possible, you should know that."

As the weapon was withdrawn from his neck, Tom slowly turned around to get a look at the person who had the drop on him. "Oh and here was me thinking I drew the short straw by getting the only squib in Hogwarts."

"Well there wasn't exactly a multitude of eligible wizards around here for me to choose from."

"Tell me about it, I saw the local clientele in the pub when I arrived late last night. Compared to some of them, you did quite well. Do you get the impression this bit of the plan wasn't too carefully thought out?"

Both relaxed and retired to the best room in the house in order to compare stories. Tom discovered he'd been created after his brother here, and had been awake longer as well. He tried to catch his counterpart up on what he'd been missing. They were speculating on how many horcruxes they had succeeded in creating and if any one else would appear. Their thoughts then turned to when they would get here when the pair got interrupted by the loud grumbling from the muggle's stomach.

It was then Tom noticed it was now evening and they'd been chatting for hours, "We really should get something to eat but I know she's useless in the kitchen."

Riddle was conversing with the muggle whose body he was inhabiting before answering his counterpart, "The muggle says he can cook so we shouldn't starve."

"Right, well this squib demands I let her out for a while each day or she tortures me mentally. Sibyll gives a whole new meaning to having that annoying song in your head that plays over and over no matter what you do. She is also the worse singer I have ever had the misfortune to hear. I suggest you should do the same or you'll need to listen to her prattle all night. She also has a bottle of sherry in her bag so I really would make myself scarce."

Riddle was confused, "How do I do that?"

"Just let go, it's almost like falling asleep. We need these two until we get here and can join as one."

This was how Frank Bryce came to find himself spending the evening sitting across from a young lady, well young compared to him! They enjoyed a nice stew and shared her sherry while listening to tales he found unbelievable. If it wasn't for the presence he could

feel at the back of his mind, Frank wouldn't have believed a word of it. Frank was beginning to think this possession might be the best thing that ever happened to him, he certainly had no other plans made for tonight. It had been many, many years since Frank spent the evening talking with any company, never mind a lady.

If giving up control of his body meant they got to do this every evening then Frank thought this was more than fair, he just hoped that whoever they were waiting on took their time getting here. Frank Bryce hadn't enjoyed a meal like this since the fifties!

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Harry, Hermione, Ron and Ginny were all enjoying a lovely meal inside Hermione's favourite restaurant, this room was amazing. She was the only one who'd actually been in a restaurant, the Weasleys had only eaten in the Leaky Cauldron while Harry hadn't even managed that!

Ginny though sounded a note of caution, "We could use this room for so much more, I think we should definitely keep it quiet though. If this became common knowledge we'd never get in here as it would always be too busy."

Ron quickly agreed with his sister, "I don't think the twins have found this room yet. Even as a refuge from them, we should keep it a secret."

Hermione also agreed, but of course for a different reason. "We would have a place to study and get our homework done in peace."

Ron theatrically rolled his eyes at her, "Surely we can up with a better use for this room than that?"

It was Harry who avoided the impending argument, "This could be the ideal place to practice defence, charms and transfiguration. We could even use it while learning how to duel, we have to be better at duelling than that idiot Lockheart!"

The other three quickly agreed this was a great idea. With the provision of extra defence lessons throughout the summer, they should be ready to begin duelling practice by the time they returned in September.

The four were having a great evening together while the rest of the school were listening to Dumbledore drone on and on. Having to politely applauded Snape for his services to Hogwarts was not something Harry was prepared to do, in this world or the next. They were also missing Slytherin getting presented with the house cup, Harry couldn't help but think it was sometimes good to be a rebel.

-oOoOo-

Although outwardly it appeared there was nothing amiss with the old wizard, Albus Dumbledore was seething. Harry Potter and his friends had not appeared for the leaving feast. Albus had been certain that a few days of eating sandwiches would have at least forced the youngest Weasley boy back to the tables.

What was the point of him making the grand gesture of awarding them house points, and winning Gryffindor the house cup, if they couldn't be bothered making an appearance? Albus decided to forego the gesture and leave things as they were, Severus could enjoy his last meal here with the hall decorated in Slytherin colours.

He should have told the house elves to make the sandwiches with nothing but marmite fillings, the only thing that tasted worse than a vomit flavoured Bertie Bott's! That would have soon had the little buggers running back here for a decent meal.

-oOoOo-

Spending time chatting with the newly returned Hagrid saw the four Gryffindors last to board the express for home, this led to them having difficulty finding a compartment that would accommodate all of them. When they spotted one that had only a single occupant, Harry quickly led the group in there.

"Excuse me miss, do you mind if we join you?"

The little blond girl peered round from the magazine she was obviously using as a barrier to hide behind. It took the startled girl a moment to realise that someone was actually speaking kindly to her, and that someone was Harry Potter. "Of course you can, oh hi Ginny, Ronald!"

Hermione was quick to notice the girl's expression changed the instant she spotted Ron. It was also hard to miss his face changing colour to match his hair. There was a story behind this and Hermione couldn't wait to hear it.

Ginny handled the introductions, "Hi Luna, you probably recognise this is Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. Guys, this is Luna Lovegood. She's our nearest neighbour and had almost as bad a first year as me. Did you get your stuff back Luna?"

The little blond couldn't look them in the eye as everyone had stopped stowing away their trunks to listen to her answer. "Yes I got it all back, they knew they would get into trouble with the school if I didn't. Ravenclaws aren't stupid."

Ron went into a rage in an instant, "Luna was getting bullied and you didn't tell me, eh us?"

Ginny glared at her brother with a look that had him squirming in discomfort, "I was being possessed by a dark lord Ron, I had other things on my mind!"

Harry intervened quickly, he'd also seen his friend blush at the glance Luna had given Ron. "Yes Ginny, and we took care of that dark lord, just as we're going to take care of this! Sorry for not giving you a choice there Luna but you're obviously friends with these two, that makes you a friend of Hermione's and mine too. Would you like to tell us about it? I promise we will do all we can to help."

Luna was fighting to stop the flow of tears that threatened to breach her defences. The boy she'd had a crush on since she was seven had just expressed concern for her. Add to that Harry Potter offering to be her friend and help, it was almost too much. Ginny hadn't been too far off the mark with her comment, Luna just spent a terrible first year at Hogwarts.

She now understood why Ginny had stopped talking to her but at the time it had been devastating. Her only friend had recently sat with Luna and explained it all. Ginny had wanted to make sure they were still friends and there was a lot of crying and hugging by the end of it.

Luna started off timidly, "I haven't settled too well into Hogwarts and most of my classes have been terrible. I have managed all the

theory quite easily, which at least kept my marks up, but I'm having great difficulty concentrating on the practical. My magic sometimes just does what it wants, rather than what I want it to do. I have been laughed at and made a fool of all year. Then they began to think it was funny to take my stuff and hide it. Now they're calling me Lonny Lovegood!" that was too much for the young girl and the tears started flowing from those beautiful eyes. Ginny was beside her friend in an instant, with Hermione's reactions not far behind her in offering comfort.

Ron stood there with his fists clenched and face now red with anger, he appeared ready to go and hunt down some bullying Ravenclaws. The crying girl touched something deep in Harry's heart, he'd plenty personal experience of bullying and understood name calling could hurt as much as any blow. Every fibre of the young Gryffindor's body was calling on him to help this young girl in distress.

Harry tried to speak to Luna twice but the girl appeared to have stored this up for the entire year and was now letting go. Since she refused to lift her head, Harry knelt in front of the crying blond so she could at least see him. "Luna, we four have arranged to receive extra lessons in defence over the summer. Perhaps practicing magic with your friends would help you gain control over it. I can at least promise that, while we may laugh with you, we will never laugh at you. If you give Ron purple hair though, all bets are off! I couldn't do anything else but collapse in laughter at that sight."

Luna appeared to consider this for a moment as she got herself back under control, she glanced from Harry to Ron, "I can't blame you for that, it would be too funny not to laugh." Luna then gave a little giggle that was almost musical and probably her first since boarding the express last September.

Hermione would be pleased to add the girl to their summer group, especially after the way Ron reacted to her but she would have to be Mrs Practical as usual. "Harry, I think that's a great idea but there are some problems in the way. Luna doesn't have an underage exemption, we would need to ask professor Lupin's permission and then there's the problem with transport."

Luna appeared crestfallen until Ron reassured her, "Don't worry about it Luna, Hermione is not saying no. she's just highlighting the problems we need to overcome before it's a definite yes. Harry and

me tend to dive in head first, Miss Granger here keeps us out of too much trouble."

"Yeah, when I'm not there, this pair end up taking a flying car from London to Hogwarts. What were you thinking?" the question was asked playfully since they were all going home and in exceptionally good spirits.

Harry came right back at her in the same vein, "We were thinking we had to get to Hogwarts or you wouldn't survive without us!" This had them laughing until Neville came bouncing into their compartment, he had to bounce as his legs were locked together by a hex.

Much to the boy's relief, Hermione applied the counter curse. "Thanks Hermione, can I sit in here with you guys? It's not safe out there."

There was no problem with Neville staying and the other three second years all came to the same conclusion at the same time. It was Ron who asked the question, "Neville, What are your plans for the summer?"

Neville never got time to answer as it became obvious who had hexed him, a smirking Malfoy and his cronies entered the compartment to grace them with his princely presence.

Harry decided that attack was the best form of defence so didn't give Draco time to deliver his rehearsed jibes. "Can we assume that, since you've finally crawled out from under that rock you've been hiding under, daddies' money eventually bought him out of trouble? I'll bet he's now regretting buying those expensive brooms so his waster of a son could get on the house Quidditch team, especially since his son was the worst player in all four teams! Let's hear your little tirade and then you can bugger off back under your rock. In all honesty Malfoy, neither you nor your father are worth my time or effort. Your father is a loser with a son whose greatest ambition is to be a bigger loser than dear old dad. You're pathetic Malfoy."

Malfoy had no answers to any of this and just stood there gasping like a halibut out of water. It eventually dawned on him he had to say something so fell back on his old favourite. "Wait until my father hears of this Potter!"

Harry just dismissed Draco out of hand, "Is that the best you've got Malfoy? Oh I'm so scared of someone who got his arse handed to him by a house elf! Now run along before I give the same house elf the pleasure of throwing you off this speeding train."

Draco was just about to sneer back that Potter didn't have the balls to carry it out. That was until he stared into those burning green eyes, which told an entirely different story. Apparently this was a very different Potter who wouldn't hesitate to carry out that threat and was really scaring the shit out of the blond Slytherin.

Draco tried a face-save that even Crabbe and Goyle saw right through, "Whatever Potter, I have better things to do than stand here listening to your rubbish." He then got out of there as fast as his damaged pride would allow.

Ron was looking at his best friend in awe, "Mate, that was bloody brilliant! Scary as hell but still bloody brilliant. Please never stare at me like that, Draco's going to need clean underwear before he gets off the train."

Hermione loved the way Harry cared for others. Seeing Neville embarrassed at being cursed and Luna crying because of being constantly bullied had ignited a furnace inside him. Draco picked the wrong time to try to goad Harry, getting roasted for his troubles. Harry's gaze was now full of concern as he focused on Neville and Luna.

"We will get something organised for the summer. This professor was apparently a good friend of my parents so I'll write to him and ask if you can be included. He'll know how to cover it with the ministry though, if all else fails, I can always ask Dumbledore. He's not exactly my favourite person at the moment but he'd like to be, if I ask he will probably say yes."

Harry considered the situation for a moment, "The biggest problem I see will be transport and I think we'll need to ask for help from..." He never got to finish as a certain elf popped into the compartment.

"Harry Potter is needing help? Maybe Dobby can help Harry Potter?"

"Um Dobby, unless you can transport people about the country then I don't think so."

The little elf was now bubbling over with excitement, "Harry Potter, Dobby can do that easy. Would Harry Potter like Dobby to help?"

The sense of longing that was broadcasting from the little elf could melt hearts stronger than theirs though Hermione asked the question that none of them had thought about.

"Dobby, won't this affect your job? Where are you working at the moment?"

The little guy's ears folded back in shame, "Dobby is not working Miss Grangie, Dobby is wanting to stay a free elf and be paid for his work. No one is willing to pay Dobby and other elves think Dobby is not right in head. They not want to work with Dobby."

Harry could visibly see the hurt this little guy had put himself through to bring him warnings. Dobby was still wearing some bandages from when he'd ironed his fingers in punishment. "What sort of wages are you looking for Dobby?"

The hope that sprang from the house elf couldn't have been more obvious if it was neon signposted. "Dobby wanted one galleon and one day off every month. If Harry Potter wanted Dobby, Dobby would work for less."

"No you will not work for less, that's already far too little! How about one galleon and one day off a week?"

Dobby really wanted to argue that was far too much, Dobby wasn't a lazy or greedy house elf. Dobby wanted desperately to work for Harry Potter though and would have done it for nothing so couldn't say no to this. "If Harry Potter wants Dobby, Dobby will say yes."

Harry held out his hand to the now crying Dobby, no wizard had ever offered to shake an elf's hand before. Dobby gladly shook the offered hand and willingly bound himself to this wizard for the rest of his life.

"Now Dobby, I'll be staying with Hermione at her house for the summer. Will you be able to find my friends if they call for you?"

Dobby stood proudly, "If Harry Potter's friends call for Dobby, Dobby will be able to find them. Dobby will go now, Dobby is happiest elf in whole world!" it was a far happier Dobby that left their carriage than entered it.

Harry returned his attention to Neville and Luna, "OK, I'll get the letter written to Professor Lupin and Hedwig can take it tonight. We'll let you all know what's happening and when to call for Dobby."

Luna turned to Ginny and asked a question that appeared to be seriously troubling her, "Is it always like this?"

Ginny glanced at Neville who was smiling, though nodded in agreement with what he knew Ginny's answer had to be. "Yes Luna, pretty much so."

Luna immediately switched her attention to Ron, "I wish you hadn't taken that flying car to Hogwarts. Maybe then you could have sat beside me on the train journey there."

Ron was flabbergasted until Harry quipped, "Luna is it ok if we laugh if it's just his face you turn purple?"

Luna appeared to consider this but he could see the girl's lips curling up into a smile, he couldn't hold his laughter any longer. He was soon joined by most of the compartment, Ron's attempts at how to answer the girl had them in stitches for many miles.

Hermione thought this was going to be an interesting summer, she had no idea how true those words would be.

A/N Thanks for reading.

Chapter 6

Harry and Hermione finally made it through the barrier at Kings Cross, after being ambushed by Molly Weasley the instant the group of friends stepped off the express. She had grasped Ginny to her ample bosoms before snaking her other arm out and snagging Harry, both youngsters found themselves pushed together by her less than gentle ministrations. One glance at a mortified Ginny showed she was aware what her mother was less than subtly trying to do here, while offering platitudes of thanks she was forcing both youngsters a lot closer than they were comfortable with. After releasing them, Molly grabbed Ron and was ready to repeat the previous manoeuvre with Hermione as her next target but had unknowingly met her match.

With a grace, speed and skill Harry didn't know she possessed, Hermione not only evaded the arm but managed to engineer Luna's capture in her stead. The three participants of this over the top greeting wore expressions that were as varied as they were priceless. Molly was trying to hide her anger at being thwarted but couldn't quite dispel the embarrassment at being so easily read. Ron was not only being hugged by his mother in front of his friends but had Luna being crushed into him as well, he was blushing bright enough to illuminate the entire station. Luna on the other hand wore a very big smile, this was all good in her book.

Having promised Luna and Neville they would see them over the summer regardless of whether the proposed lessons were available or not, Harry and Hermione got out of there fast.

Hermione now raced toward her parents as Harry followed on behind at a more sedate pace, giving himself a chance to study the people he was going to be spending the summer with. He had met them once before, though 'met' might be too strong a word to use. After flooing into Knockturn, being photographed with Lockheart and the fight Arthur had with Lucius, Harry could barely remember what they looked like from that very eventful day.

In Harry's opinion, Hermione's mum was beautiful, a voice at the back of Harry's mind shouted that he better snap Hermione up quickly before someone else did. Harry could easily have picked her mother out in a crowd because they were as alike as sisters. Mrs Granger was about six inches taller than her daughter, with tamed

hair and smaller front teeth but still unmistakably Hermione's mum. Her dad was a different story, only the brown eyes reminded Harry of Hermione and even then the resemblance was only in their colour. Those brown eyes were currently examining Harry in a way Hermione's never would, they were making a judgement and Harry clearly wasn't passing whatever criteria he was being measured against.

Only when Hermione moved from hugging her mum to her dad did Harry spot the warmth he associated with orbs of that particular colour, the instant the man looked at his daughter Harry knew where Hermione had inherited her lovely eyes from. Her dad was about six foot in height, with dark hair that was beginning to go grey and recede at the front while the paunch at his waist increased. Harry thought Hermione had definitely got the best of the deal. He had just manfully stuck his hand out toward Mr Granger when another meaty one closed on his shoulder.

A voice Harry never wanted to hear again spoke from behind him. "Boy, we've been waiting here for bloody ages! Get your trunk and that bloody bird so we can get out of here."

Harry cringed under the firm grip and didn't need to turn around to know his uncle's face would be that particular shade of puce only this obese man seemed able to replicate. "Uncle Vernon, didn't the school contact you?"

"Is that why that ruddy owl was hanging about our property? The neighbours noticed it before we were able to drive the stupid bird away by throwing sticks at it. Dudley, you can have that air rifle you wanted, and you boy will pay for that freakishness when we get you home. Let's get out of here, this place is full of your sort!"

Harry was horrified, he could understand why he wouldn't make a good first impression on Hermione's parents, dressed as he was, but to throw in the Dursleys was just too much. Petunia was using her long neck to get her nose in the air, as usual, sniffing for any whiff of perceived scandal or newsworthy gossip. Dear cousin Dudley meanwhile was stuffing his face with a massive slice of pizza while holding something that resembled a bucket of coke in his other hand. Dudley was well beyond supersize now, he passed mega on his way to giga and appeared hell bent on being the first terasized human. Given his current rate of food consumption, he should attain

that target by the time he reaches twenty one. What was the point in getting the key to the door if you were too large to fit through the thing?

Harry tried to refocus his wandering mind on the task at hand, this could get ugly but he didn't care. If all else failed, there was always the Leaky cauldron and enough gold in his vault to rent a room for the summer.

"Uncle Vernon, that owl was carrying a letter informing you I wouldn't be staying at Privet Drive this summer."

Vernon was now so angry he was spraying Harry with spittle, strained through that dead rat he had living on his top lip of course. "Are you telling me we drove all the way out here for nothing?"

Vernon's temper was only halted by the intervention of Hermione's father. "Excuse me sir, we would appear to have a slight misunderstanding here. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Daniel Granger and your nephew is apparently spending the summer with us."

It wasn't the words spoken that stopped Vernon's temper, more the universal sign of normality in his book. The printed business card that Mr Granger presented him with indicated at once to the obese bigot that this man could not be a freak.

Vernon switched modes so quickly, Harry's head was spinning. "Please to meet you Doctor Granger, I see your good lady is a dentist as well. I don't know if I would feel comfortable inflicting my nephew on good people like yourselves for the entire summer."

Harry was left wondering if that card was printed in Braille, his uncle appeared to upload all the information on the card by touch alone as he'd merely glanced at it.

Dan was being magnanimous, "Not at all, he's my daughter Hermione's best friend and we're looking forward to having him stay with us this summer. I realise this is extremely short notice and a bit of an imposition to your family so how would your family like to come to our house for dinner on Sunday? It would maybe put your mind at rest concerning your nephew's welfare while in our care."

At the mention of 'Doctor', aunt Petunia had appeared at her husband's side in a flash. She had accepted the invitation so quickly, Hermione's jaw never even had time to drop open.

As Dan provided the address and directions, Emma's polite smile was frozen in place. She couldn't really blame her husband as they hadn't told him the main reason Harry was staying with them over the summer. Had he known about the bars on the boy's window or cat-flap for feeding on his bedroom door, the Dursleys wouldn't have gotten within miles of an invitation to their house. She would now have to play hostess to these people for an evening. One glance at her daughter told Emma it could be quite a night, she was staring daggers at the Dursleys and looked ready to rip them to pieces.

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Harry and Dan loaded the two trunks before Harry joined Hermione in the back seat of the range rover, neither Hermione nor her mum had uttered a word since the dinner invitation to the Dursleys had been issued.

Harry saw Dan again checking him out in the rear view mirror and decided to address at least one of the issues, "Mr Granger, would it be possible to visit Gringotts while we're in London? Hermione has promised to take me clothes shopping and I need to get some gold from my vault. There is also a bit of business I need to discuss with the goblins but that can wait if we don't have time today."

Dan's eyebrows raised at the mention of vault and agreed they could go there now. "If we end up running late, it will be take-away for dinner tonight."

Dan had heard from his wife that this boy was famous though didn't believe a word of it, he was being forced to reconsider his opinion at the moment. They had just walked into the Leaky Cauldron and Dan heard the boy's name on everyone's lips. People were now wanting to shake his hand or pat him on the back, getting into the alley caused the same reaction. Everyone appeared to know exactly who he was.

In the bank, the goblins quickly agreed to a meeting and Harry was smiling as they sat in a converted mining cart. Emma's fingers were

almost meeting through Dan's arm as her grip stopped the blood flowing to his fingers, the two kids were in front and clearly enjoying the ride. When the cart stopped in front of a heavy door, he was still trying to calm his wife when he glimpsed gold through the now open door. It was one thing to say someone had heaps of money, quite another thing to see such a mountain of bullion. The boy was scooping gold coins into a bag at a rate that was mind boggling, Dan knew the exchange rate and Harry must have more than a few thousand pounds in that bag without it even being noticeably missing from the massive mountain of precious metal that remained.

The lad was famous, rich and yet had impeccable manners as well as being Hermione's best friend. It was no wonder his family was upset he wouldn't be spending the summer with them, Dan was currently having to re-evaluate his opinion of the lad.

Emma was delighted to get out of that cart after the return journey and swore she would never enter one again voluntarily, she noticed the thoughtful expression on Dan's face and hoped he didn't make a fool of himself. He hadn't exactly welcomed Harry with opened arms and she knew discovering the boy was clearly wealthy could unleash Dan's inner snob she so disliked.

They were shown into a room where she and Dan gratefully took the offered seats as the goblin sat at a desk before addressing Harry. Both kids were sitting in front of the parents and Emma could see her husband's opinion of the boy climbing by the minute. Considering her suspicions on where these two were going to end up, that was probably not a bad thing.

"How may Gringotts assist you, I understand you mentioned business?"

"I was advised that Gringotts was my best option for having a basilisk that I killed recovered, rendered into commercial components and sold."

The goblin immediately sat up straighter, "Where is this basilisk and approximately what size is it?"

"It's sitting in Slytherin's chamber of secrets and I was too busy trying to stay alive to measure it. Professor Dumbledore had a

device that allowed us to see memories, if you have anything like that I could show you."

The goblin was now shaking with anticipation, the opportunity for profit being earned here was immense! "I will have to speak with my superiors, if you will excuse me for a moment." The goblin didn't wait for an answer but actually ran out the room.

Hermione was leaning into Harry and whispering so her parents wouldn't hear. "Is this a good idea Harry? My parents might flip at seeing this."

Harry's mind was made up though, "If they don't want me to stay Hermione, I'll take a room at the Leaky Cauldron for the summer."

That wasn't what Hermione meant but she had to pick him up on something, "Not the Burrow Harry?"

"I want to choose my own girlfriend in my own time, not have Mrs Weasley do it for me. I will be staying clear of there until she settles down."

Hermione couldn't resist teasing him, "Maybe if you had one, she would leave you alone."

Harry teased right back, "If I asked the girl I want to then I definitely would be spending the summer staying at the Leaky Cauldron. I don't think your dad likes me at the moment, he would like me even less then."

Hermione's eyes were wide and sparkling with excitement that Harry would say such a thing, she'd hoped for it but not expected it so soon. "Perhaps it would be a good idea to ask now, if things go the way I think they will, I might not be at Hogwarts next year. Oh and in case you're worried, the answer will most definitely be yes!"

"Unless your parents move you to an all girls school, I will be with you. I will ask, just not here and now. Soon though!"

Hermione was ecstatic with that answer, it took all her will power not to kiss him right here and now. With both her parents watching them like hawks, that would probably not be a good idea.

Emma watched the two together and could see the closeness that she had hoped for her friendless little girl, she understood Hermione was looking for more and Harry appeared quite agreeable. This was going to be an interesting summer.

The goblin returned with another two who were obviously his superiors, one was actually the director of the bank.

"Mr Potter, my name is Ragnok and I understand you have a memory you wish to share with us? We goblins do things slightly different from wizards." He had a black cube that was about four inches across and covered with golden runes. It opened at the front with two invisibly hinged doors and held a blood red crystal that almost filled the inside of the cube.

Ragnok's long fingers carefully removed the crystal and held it toward Harry, "I need you to think of the memory and then press this crystal against your forehead."

Harry did as he was requested before returning the now glowing crystal, Ragnok placed it on top of the cube before touching a few of the runes in a specific order. A scene in three dimensions and at about one tenth scale projected above the cube, it began when Harry was standing in front of the inner door and played from there.

Emma's gaze kept switching from the incredible scene she was watching to the kids in front of her, she noticed Hermione burrowing into Harry's chest but didn't think it was anything to do with his concern for the girl lying on the stone floor. There was obviously a lot she and Dan weren't being told here and their daughter was seriously worried about their reaction to this. She would have to keep an eye on Dan as well.

When that thing Emma could only think of as some dinosaur throwback came out that statue's mouth, she let out an involuntary scream. Her nerves were ripped to shreds as the beast continually tried its best to kill Harry at the urging of the older boy. Everyone was riveted to the projection although Hermione seemed to spend more time burrowing into Harry than watching as the scene built to its climax.

The imagery was stunning and incredibly realistic, making you actually feel like a participant rather than an observer. So much so

that Dan was on his feet, punching the air and shouting 'YES!', when Harry stabbed the beast. The mood changed dramatically when they saw that fang protruding from the boy's arm, even though Harry was sitting in front of them so clearly had recovered, Emma was still reduced to tears.

The memory finished after Harry stabbed the diary and the little girl woke, Ragnok was now the one on his feet.

"Mr Potter, this raises so many questions but the most important one is, do you know what that book was?"

"It was a diary Riddle made into a horcrux, we know for certain he made more than one of these things but not what he did with them. Lucius Malfoy dumped this one onto Ginny Weasley, knowing full well what it had the potential to do."

Ragnok turned to the goblin who had accompanied him into the room, "Barchoke, if there are more of these things I want to know for certain that none of them are in our bank. Anyone placing a horcrux in their vault will lose every knut they have deposited with Gringotts, this clearly is a breach of their agreement with the bank. I want every vault checked, start with suspected death eaters first."

Barchoke nodded and left immediately to organise this massive task, their original goblin now looked toward Harry with something resembling awe. "Was that really the sword of Godric Gryffindor?"

Harry just nodded, he had both arms around a shaking Hermione. Behind them, Dan was in an identical situation with a tearful Emma.

Ragnok got down to business, time was money after all. "Mr Potter, exactly what is it you are requesting of us?"

"Ragnok, I would like you to take over and deal with the basilisk on every level. I realise there would be a cost for these services and I hope you can take them from the profit raised at the end. When that is done, I would like the remainder split five ways. Equal parts to myself, Hermione here, Ron and Ginny Weasley with the final part going to Hogwarts."

Ragnok nodded that was acceptable while wondering if the young wizard realised how much trust he was placing in them. "Mr Potter,

that is by far the biggest basilisk I or anyone else has ever seen. Normally flooding the market would drive prices down but I think I have a way to increase profits for all of us. We have Salazar Slytherin's basilisk being slain by Godric Gryffindor's sword wielded by Harry Potter, those facts being known will probably drive the prices up."

Dan had been out of his depth since he entered the room, what he'd just witnessed was the bravest thing he'd ever seen or would see. Emma had spent days pounding on him not to make a snap judgement on the lad but to take time and they would discuss it when they were alone. They were going to be talking for hours tonight. Watching how close his daughter was to this boy finally allowed what Emma had been saying to percolate into his brain, it was time for a Granger charm offensive though he would have to be careful.

Here though was something he understood, Harry had just given Hermione twenty percent of whatever this beast was worth but no one was talking numbers. Dan liked to hear the numbers, "Excuse me Mr Ragnok, could you give us some idea of what kind of money we're talking here?"

"Mr Granger, because of their rarity, basilisk ingredients are among the most expensive items in our world. Some are actually worth a lot more than their weight in gold. If things go as I expect, I see no reason that we couldn't be talking about a million."

Dan Granger liked numbers and he really liked that one, "Are you saying my daughter is going to share a million pounds?"

"No Mr Granger, I'm saying I expect all five to receive around a million galleons each. This really is unprecedented so I could be wrong, but I don't think so. A goblin would pay thousands for a fang like the one Mr Potter here pulled out his arm, attached to a goblin blade it would be a deadly weapon of great beauty and power. That beast had many, many more waiting to be harvested. The fangs are by no means the most precious items this carcass contains, nothing will be wasted."

"Harry, that's too much..."

Hermione was stopped from saying any more as Harry interrupted her, "Hermione, without you Ginny would be dead and we would have Voldemort to deal with. Tell me again why you don't think you earned that?"

"I think there's a lot you will be telling us over the course of this holiday, I want to know everything that's going on. Hermione, we need to make a decision on your future and can't if we don't have the information. We have to know it's safe before we let you back on that train."

Hermione understood she was in trouble, this coming from her father she expected, that it was her mother laying down the law meant she might not be going back to Hogwarts. Her mum was always her biggest supporter, if she'd lost that then things were really looking bleak.

Harry attempted to change the subject, "Ragnok, would it be possible to arrange a holiday to the Romanian dragon reserve for my friend Hagrid? If this can be done could you send the arrangements to me? He bought me my first present and I think it's fitting if that present now delivers one to him, Hedwig would enjoy that."

Ragnok didn't think that would be a problem, the goblin also thought the memory recording of him speaking parseltongue would open the door. Harry then told Ragnok where the entrance was in the girl's bathroom. If this could be done without Harry having to go back down there, he would be delighted. They settled some final arrangements before shaking hands on the deal.

Dan left the office wondering how the parental positions became reversed, Emma had surprised him with her comment against Hermione. He was now looking at this boy Harry in a whole new light. His vault held millions and he just made Hermione a millionaire, his daughter obviously liked the boy and he ticked all the boxes Dan had when it came to someone for his little princess.

-oOoOo-

There wasn't much meaningful talk in the car on the way home, Dan was attempting to interest Harry in golf and had invited him to his club to play a round. Hermione was silently seething at her father's

behaviour. Until they left Gringotts her dad had been looking at Harry like he was some charity case forced upon them, his entire attitude changed with his first glance inside the Potter vault. Her mother was genuinely concerned after seeing the basilisk while her dad appeared too busy counting money to care Harry almost died!

They drew up to the Granger's house and Harry had to admire it, the whole building screamed character and it was the kind of house the Dursleys would kill for. It was an impressive Victorian three-storied building with ivy growing up the walls and around the bay windows. There was even a section that looked like a turret with the whole building surrounded by an immaculate lawn and garden. There literally wasn't a leaf out of place. The many windows sparkled in the early evening sunshine as Harry noticed both Grangers staring at the house as if it was a stranger? His immediate sense of something not being right had him reaching for his wand, Hermione close behind him. "Mum, Dad, what's wrong? I can't see anything out of order. The place looks wonderful."

It was her mother who answered, "That's the problem love, I've been at your father all week to mow the lawn and it looks as if the whole place has been spruced up from top to bottom."

Harry was chuckling as he put his wand away, "Mr and Mrs Granger, I think I know what's happened here. We would really need to go inside to discuss it though."

They entered the hall, which had a floor so clean you could have eaten your dinner off it. Emma and Dan stood looking all around while waiting on an explanation, Harry called for his little friend.

Dobby appeared in a miniature school robe displaying the Potter family crest. "Harry Potter sir is home! Dobby didn't know when you would be here so kept himself busy tidying up. Dobby will now make dinner for Harry Potter and his Grangers."

With that he popped away to the absolute astonishment of both Granger parents.

Dan was muttering quietly to himself, "Famous, rich and has magical servants, our Hermione has hit the jackpot!" Unfortunately for Dan, he wasn't whispering quietly enough and both significant females in

his life heard every word. Hermione ran away in tears while Emma appeared ready to explode.

"Harry, would you mind going after Hermione? I need to have a few words in private with my husband."

Harry followed in the general direction Hermione had headed and noticed an open French door leading out into the back garden. Hermione was sitting on a bench swing seat with her head in her hands crying. Harry sat beside her, putting his arm around her shoulder as she lent into him.

It took Hermione a few minutes before she felt able to talk. "I'm so sorry Harry, the whole point was to get you away from the Dursleys for the summer. Not only does my dad invite them to dinner, he seems determined to turn into your uncle. Don't think I didn't notice he was treating you like a bit of rubbish until he saw the inside of your vault. Now he's almost got me married off to you!"

"Hermione, is your dad likely to lock me in a cupboard? Make me work all summer while starving me at the same time? Will I need to smuggle Hedwig out the house for safety because he's going to buy my nutcase cousin an air-rifle? Like a lot of others, he's impressed by the money and fame. If that means he's going to do a Mrs Weasley and push me together with his amazing, incredible, beautiful daughter, then I have finally found a reason not to hate my fame. It's your mother I'm really worried about, what will she do when she finds out it's not the school that's dangerous to be around but me?"

Hermione had gotten over her tears, cuddling into Harry while he said those words made her feel too good to be crying. "We'll just have to explain that I'm not going anywhere without you, maybe you should ask me now Harry?" she emphasised her point by kissing him again, third time was definitely the charm because he was ready for her and returned the kiss.

"Not yet Hermione, I want your parents to know everything first. If I'm going to be their daughter's boyfriend then they deserve to know. They might decide to keep us apart for your safety and I couldn't really blame them."

"Well I bloody would! Dad's already in the doghouse, hopefully mum won't be joining him. I still can't believe we're sitting down to dinner with those creeps on Sunday, I don't know if I'll be able to last the evening without hexing them."

Harry actually smiled at her, "Just watch their faces as Dobby serves dinner, I'll bet money they won't eat it!"

Hermione even smiled back at him, "I suppose we really should go back in before mum and dad start wondering what we're up to out here." As she said this though, Hermione snuggled in tighter. Harry certainly wasn't in any hurry to move.

Mum and dad were currently listening at the still open French door after Emma had dragged Dan there to see what damage he had done, she now pulled him into the living room where they could talk privately.

Dan was livid, "Locked him in a cupboard and then starved the boy? Did you know about this?"

For the first time today Emma was pleased at her husband's reaction, he was actually showing genuine concern for the boy. "That's one of the reasons Hermione wanted him living here for the summer, last year they put bars on his window and passed a little food through a cat flap on his door. He seems a nice boy and even you must see our daughter really likes him. You have reached the stage where Hermione classes you the same as that man we met today, a man she despises with every fibre of her being. It's as I warned you, if you don't stop this stupidity you could end up losing your precious daughter. Her friends are now millionaires, that should be good enough even by your standards! I'm more concerned with what's going on that Harry thinks we might want to split them up. Just from today I can see that would break Hermione's heart."

Emma could also see she was finally getting through to her husband, "Am I really that bad?"

"Just be yourself, the man that both women in this house love. Lose the pompous arsehole, him neither of us can stand. Save all your boasting for that bloody golf club of yours, at least then we don't have to hear it. Why don't you take them both to a football match

over the summer, anything to get you away from those bores down there. I swear you've become worse since joining that club."

How do you explain to a female about the camaraderie of an all male environment, or the one-upmanship that goes on there, or that the football season stops for the summer! "There is no football currently but the Open is at the Royal St Georges in Sandwich, perhaps they would like that?"

Emma was saved from delivering her scathing answer by the little creature called Dobby announcing that dinner was ready. The house was sparkling like a new pin and now her meals were going to be not only cooked, but served as well. Perhaps Harry could stay here all the time.

-oOoOo-

Crappy was not a happy goblin but then he sometimes thought all the happiness had been drained out of him that fateful day over twenty years ago. It was on that day the bitter little goblin made one of life's great discoveries. It wouldn't matter what he accomplished or how he lived for the rest of his life, shit yourself just once in class and that's all anybody would ever remember about you. His real name was Bloodfist but he hadn't heard another soul utter that since his mother died over a decade ago.

On the day he discovered he would never be a dragon handler, he had nervously laughed along with the others at his misfortune, the nick-names had soon started flying about and he was actually quite pleased when it settled on Crappy. Who wants to go through life answering to Shitter?

Crappy had then become his name as everything in his life quickly turned the same, even now he still got the shitiest jobs that no one else wanted. One day he would show them all, one day they would regret what they had done to him. Every goblin would kneel before him, especially one or two of the prettiest females. Yes one day, but not today because as usual he had been given another crap job that no one else wanted.

Need a crappy job done, then send for Crappy! That's exactly what they did and why he came to be whizzing around vaults, casting scans from outside the doors. Of course, should he find anything, he

was to summon some real goblins to take care of it. Some day Crappy would show them all, one day. Now whose vault was next on that list?

-oOoOo-

Hermione kept glancing at Harry while he was eating breakfast, he ate every Dobby prepared morsel with a wide grin on his face. Last night had gone better than they could have hoped for. After dinner they had told her parents everything, including that it was Harry who Voldemort was after.

Hermione had bitten her lip nervously until her mother had said that they wouldn't be making any decisions tonight, she wanted to wait a while until they could get their heads around this problem. Really Emma just wanted to see how things went with Harry and Hermione, she would be having that talk with her daughter tomorrow as she and Dan needed their own talk tonight.

A relieved Hermione had taken Harry upstairs to show him where he would be sleeping, he had took her in his arms and asked Hermione if she would be his girlfriend. She said yes before kissing him goodnight and quickly getting out of there, she didn't want to give her parents any more reasons for keeping her and her new boyfriend apart. She lay in her bed smiling happily at the thought of Harry lying on the other side of the wall from her. This was going to be a wonderful summer.

Today they were going shopping with her mum to buy clothes for Harry, Hermione felt a little shiver of anticipation at the prospect of dressing her boyfriend in some more fitting clothes. As it was a very pleasant morning, the doors leading out into the garden were open and it was through those that the rather regal owl flew, heading straight for Harry. When she noticed Harry's smile become a deep frown, Hermione was moving to see what could cause this reaction. She didn't have to look far. Also with the package that was clearly from Gringotts was today's edition of the Daily Prophet, the front page was epic. It consisted almost entirely of a moving picture showing Harry Potter stabbing Slytherin's basilisk using Gryffindor's sword.

Harry's voice was devoid of emotion as he passed comment on the picture, "Well I should really have asked Ragnok how he was going

to keep the price up, I guess we now know. If people will spend their gold on all that fake stuff about me that's out there, what do you think they'll pay for a small piece of this?"

Hermione didn't have time to answer, her dad had just led a very angry Albus Dumbledore into the kitchen.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 7

Albus Dumbledore struggled desperately to control his temper, something he usually accomplished with very little effort, though these were exasperating circumstances. Harry Potter possessed the ability to light his fuse better than anyone since his brother Abe, Albus knew he couldn't go off like a firecracker here, much as he'd like to! Having Hogwarts business Albus needed kept secret splashed all over the front page of the Daily Prophet just fanned the flames of his temper. The associated articles painting him as a bumbling fool were all the more hurtful by being almost entirely factually correct.

Albus dropped his copy of the Prophet onto the table, next to the identical one Harry was currently reading. "I would like an explanation Mr Potter."

The headmaster though had made a tactical error, he had basically treated the Grangers as if they were irrelevant in their own home. Emma proceeded to ensure that was something he would never do again. She couldn't help but recognise the headmaster from Hermione's descriptions, the irate mother verbally went straight for the jugular.

"Headmaster Dumbledore, you must have read my mind because that's exactly what I want from you. Let me say here and now, your answers will determine what school my daughter attends this September."

Albus was mentally dismissing this as inconsequential until Harry seriously upped the ante. "Should Hermione leave for another school, it would be my intention to transfer there as well. Ron and Ginny Weasley would probably move too!"

This threw Albus off his game plan and Emma pressed home her temporary advantage. "I would like you to explain how someone being petrified like stone equates to 'fine but unable to write home at the moment.' There was also no mention of a deadly giant creature that was stalking the school and putting students in the infirmary. Oh I forgot, you had no idea what was causing it yet a second year student of non-magical parents could figure it out? It also took a couple of second years to save that poor girl while you sat clueless

in your office. I would like, no I demand an explanation of these events."

Emma was so focused on Dumbledore, she'd missed Dan once more going to answer the front door. There were now two additional people in the kitchen, one of them was the only person Emma had ever seen wearing a monocle. This witch was currently glaring sternly at the headmaster while the other man was almost as poorly dressed as Harry. She could see her husband quietly keeping a close eye on the wizard in case he made off with the family silver.

Both clearly knew Dumbledore and the monocle wearing witch handled the introductions. "Good Morning and sorry for this intrusion. I am Madam Amelia Bones, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. This gentleman here is Professor Remus Lupin who I happened to meet on your doorstep. This situation is rather fortuitous as I had also intended to speak with the headmaster here, this should save me a trip to Scotland."

Remus was staring at Harry as if he'd seen a ghost, even without his glasses, the likeness to James was remarkable. "Harry, I got your owl but after seeing this morning's paper thought it would be better if I called in person. Sorry if I'm staring but you are the spitting image of your father at the same age..."

Harry and Hermione finished it for Remus, "...except for the eyes, you have your mother's eyes!"

Remus laughed and knew instantly he was going to like these two. "Ok, I assume from your answer you've been told that once or twice before? Doesn't make it any less true though."

The hostess in Emma soon had all her 'guests' seated around the table although no one wanted refreshments. It was straight down to business which suited everyone.

Amelia got the ball rolling. "Mr Potter, I have already been to Gringotts and seen the entire memory you provided them with. Can I ask your reason for giving the goblins that memory?"

Albus couldn't have put it better himself, this was exactly the information he wanted to hear.

Harry had done nothing wrong and there was no reason to hide anything. "I wanted the goblins' assistance in selling the basilisk I killed. They asked me for some details I didn't know so I offered them my memory of the whole thing. The goblins said they would try to get the best possible price, I've just discovered how they plan to do that. By publicising this was Slytherin's basilisk killed by me, the boy who lived!"

Amelia studied the lad, his distaste when he used his unofficial title was there for all to see. He obviously hated his fame, exactly as Susan had told her. Amelia now felt more comfortable about what she was going to say. "Mr Potter, your actions inside that chamber were without doubt the bravest deeds I have ever seen! The ministry at this moment is sinking under a deluge of owls from people who have read about your adventure underneath Hogwarts. Some ask if it's true, most are outraged that they were told nothing about it while almost all demand you be rewarded for your unbelievable daring and outstanding display of courage."

Harry was uncomfortable with the praise, "Madam Bones, I rescued our friend and that's all that counts. I have no need, nor would I accept an award from the ministry."

Amelia was perplexed by this so asked Harry to elaborate on that last comment for her.

"The minister came to Hogwarts personally to arrest my friend Hagrid, just to publically be seen to be doing something. I would guess that same minister would be heavily involved in getting Lucius Malfoy declared an innocent man. I lost Hermione for three weeks and we nearly lost Ginny forever yet Malfoy walks free, probably with a ministerial apology ringing in his ears. This is the same principle I had regarding Snape, I will have nothing to do with Minister Fudge while he supports criminals like the Malfoys."

Moony's interest was piqued by that last comment until Hermione explained what happened at Hogwarts, Remus was now staring at Dumbledore and seeing the man in a new light. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out he was being employed to teach defence in the hope of appeasing Harry, the summer lessons made more sense to the marauder now.

The summer lessons were also on Harry's mind as he thought how he could use this situation to his advantage. "Madam Bones, Professor Lupin has agreed to provide us with extra defence lessons during the summer. We wanted to add a few friends but they would get into trouble for performing underage magic, could you advise us on the best way to avoid this?"

Hermione loved when Harry let his intelligent side out to play, he could easily have used his position to make demands. Asking for help was a brilliant idea and she tried to sweeten the deal. "If Professor Lupin here agrees, we would be delighted to invite Susan along as well."

Remus quickly gave his opinion that the more students he taught over the summer would only help him judge their skill levels and adjust his lesson plans accordingly. "After all, if I base all my lessons on someone who can defeat a basilisk, I might find myself having to rewrite them by the end of the first week!"

Harry had managed to push Dumbledore's buttons once again by neatly side-stepping him to get what he wanted, this was not something Albus could allow to happen. It was supposed to be him Harry trusted and turned to for help. "I'm sorry Harry but that's not the arrangement I made with Professor Lupin. As I am paying him, I fear I cannot allow these changes. I'm sorry but my decision is final."

Remus was livid and just about to lose his much needed job when Harry interrupted. "That's fine Headmaster, I will quite happily pay for Professor Lupin's time over the summer. It will also help with my decision where I go to school next year. The last two defence professors you picked were not only terrible at their job, both tried to kill me. What is it they say, third time's the charm?"

There were four adult cries of 'what!' while Albus remained silent, that didn't mean the phrase 'oh shit!' wasn't running continually through his thoughts.

Amelia was again pure business, "Mr Potter, I need you to elaborate on that statement for me please?"

Emma gave him encouragement and Harry was glad the fury she was containing wasn't aimed in his direction, mother and daughter were more alike than they knew. "Yes Harry, I really want to hear

how two teachers employed by the headmaster here tried to murder students."

Some things began to make sense for Harry, "I'm sorry Madam Bones, I assumed the headmaster would keep you informed with what was going on. I also assume that's also why he barged in here this morning in a strop."

"Was that really called for Harry?"

Emma jumped all over Dumbledore, ensuring his play to make the boy feel guilty didn't work. "Yes it was called for and also true, please continue Harry."

"Well Professor Lockhart proved to be a total fraud. Ron and I sought him out when we discovered where Ginny was, the coward tried to run away. Turns out the only spell he could do was obliviate! He would use it on the people whose stories he stole, passing their heroic deeds off as his own, despicable. He planned on leaving both Ron and I down there to die, promising to immortalise us in his latest work of fiction."

Hermione had the good grace to blush, remembering her short-lived crush on the fraud. Emma asked a perfectly normal question from a concerned parent. "Why didn't you tell another teacher Harry?"

"The three of us went to Professor McGonagall last year and she didn't believe us. I ended up facing Professor Quirrell, who just happened to have Voldemort growing out the back of his head."

It was a shocked Amelia who found her voice first, "What happened then Harry?"

It was only because the room was utterly silent that they heard his whispered answer, "I killed him."

As a conversation stopper, that one was hard to beat. Hermione was the only one who recognised the devastation in his voice, he'd spoken about this when she was petrified and she was aware how much that action still hurt her boyfriend. They hadn't mentioned this last night but parents be dammed, she positioned herself on his knee and gently kissed him. "Harry, Voldemort was trying to kill you and get the Philosopher's stone that the headmaster had hidden in

the school. It would have made him not only immortal but incredibly wealthy, you saved us all again."

Just when Amelia thought this could get more confusing, that revelation blew her away. She could see Harry's somewhat fragile state and gently asked the question she needed answered. "Harry, could you tell us how you managed that?"

With Hermione's arms around him, Harry drew strength from his girlfriend and spoke about something that had prayed on his mind since it happened. "I just touched him Madam Bones, his flesh turned to ash in my hands. The headmaster told me it was because Voldemort couldn't stand love, that my mother's love protected me." Harry was now hugging Hermione even tighter. "There must be some truth in that because when Voldemort tried to possess me in the infirmary, the love of my friends and Hermione returning to my side allowed me to beat him again. Ron told me Dumbledore's only involvement was to make sure I would die if I lost the battle against Voldemort, thanks for that sir!"

As everyone contemplated what Harry meant by that, Dan spoke for the first time that morning. The authority in his voice was unmistakable, he'd reached his decision and wouldn't be swayed. "Hermione Jane Granger, you will not be returning to that nut house! I am perfectly happy to accept you are a witch but cannot believe that Hogwarts is the best place for you to learn to use your magic. Thanks to Harry's generosity, you and your friends have the means to attend any school in the world. We will be spending the summer searching for a new one. Madam Bones, I would appreciate any help you can give me on this matter. Ragnok has also promised us help if we need it and I intend to take him up on that offer. As for you headmaster, frankly I wouldn't believe you if you told me rain was wet!"

Emma looked toward her daughter, still perched on her new boyfriend's lap. "Sorry dear, in this matter I agree totally with your father. We wouldn't be able to sleep at night if we sent you back there."

Hermione could only nod in acceptance. "I can't say it's not something Harry and I haven't talked about, we've discussed it quite a bit actually."

Harry couldn't argue with the Grangers decision either, time to state his intentions. "Headmaster, I will not be returning to Hogwarts in September."

This morning had not gone well for Dumbledore since he first glanced at the Prophet but that declaration sent a chill down his spine. "That's not a decision you can make Mr Potter, your guardians would have to agree to it."

Harry almost laughed at the irony of that, "I'll have no problems then, they never wanted me to go to Hogwarts in the first place. They're coming here for dinner on Sunday night, I'll owl Professor McGonagall for the correct forms they need to sign. Failing that, I'm sure Ragnok could get them for us."

This was the second time that name had been mentioned, Dumbledore was surprised that they had heard of the goblin leader. "How do you know Ragnok?"

"Oh, it was him I gave the memory to. He said that anything we needed, he would be delighted to help. He's offered to put wards around this house so we don't get bothered by people wanting to gawk at us. I have no interest in being in the press and don't wish reporters hanging around us all summer."

Albus continued on regardless, "Never the less, I don't think it would be in your best interest to leave Hogwarts."

Emma was incensed but also determined to use her anger constructively, the long talk they had with the kids last night was still fresh in her mind. They would be having another one later about some of the little details about Harry they'd apparently glossed over. "Madam Bones, my daughter has been attacked by a troll and a basilisk while attending Hogwarts. Surely there must be some way I can press charges against the school, and particularly the headmaster, for negligence against children in their care?"

Amelia raised her eyebrows while Remus asked if he'd heard her right. "A troll and a basilisk?"

Emma nodded, "The basilisk attacked her in a corridor, I also understand there were some previous victims? The troll was let into

the school by the same Professor Quirrell, it trapped her in a bathroom with only Harry and Ron's intervention saving her life."

Amelia could only shake her head, "Harry could I return sometime with a pensieve to take a look at your extraordinary experiences inside Hogwarts? I feel it's way passed time the ministry held an official investigation into just what goes on inside that castle. Albus, if Hogwarts wasn't already closed for the summer, I would have seen it closed today."

Albus was getting seriously worried about anyone seeing more memories, he tried to call her bluff. "You don't have that authority Amelia."

The head of the DMLE had no intention of backing down. "Just try me Albus, my Susan might be looking for a new school come September as well. These are children's lives we're dealing with here. If I find you have acted irresponsibly in any way, I will come after you with everything I have. Susan is the last surviving member of my family, all those Bones's didn't die standing against evil so you could play fast and loose with her life."

Emma smiled for the first time today, "Madam Bones, you are welcome in this house anytime." The smile vanished as she turned to face Dumbledore , "You sir are not, don't let the door hit you on the way out."

Dumbledore left with as much dignity as he could muster.

Amelia let him go, deciding to wait until she had seen more of Harry's memories before confronting him again. She smiled to Emma, "Mrs Granger, if that offer of a cup of tea still holds..."

The shocks weren't over for the day as tea, coffee and freshly baked scones appeared on the table. "You have a house elf?"

"Oh Dobby actually works for Harry. We only met him last night and already he seems to know what we want before we do. The little guy is just fantastic!"

Amelia looked over her teacup toward Harry, knowing there was another story here. What an extraordinary young man.

Harry answered her as best he could, "Dobby used to be owned by the Malfoys, he risked his life to warn me what Lucius was up to. I tricked Malfoy into freeing Dobby and he now works for me. Dobby is going to bring our friends here for the defence lessons."

Hermione gasped, "Oh Damn! Harry, our friends?"

It was Emma though who answered. "Hermione Jane, sitting on your boyfriend's knee and now the language? Don't think I've forgotten the kissing either, we will be having a long talk later."

Hermione was glowing from embarrassment before Harry saved her. "Mrs Granger, it's my fault. I wanted to keep that we were giving our friends a portion of the money as a surprise. They won't know what to make of all that in the paper this morning. We really need to go and see them but I might just need a bodyguard."

This drew glances from everyone before it was Hermione's turn to save Harry from embarrassment. "Mrs Weasley appears to think that Harry would make the perfect boyfriend for her daughter. That Ginny also has a massive crush on Harry doesn't help matters."

Dan was the one who was clueless now, "I thought this Ginny was your friend? Are you ok with her having a crush on your boyfriend?"

"Dad, half the witches in Hogwarts have a crush on my Harry!"

Amelia nearly choked on her tea as the truth of that statement hit home. "I certainly know one or two witches who would fall into that category." This caused some titters at the table, mainly at the obvious discomfort Harry showed at that statement.

Dan Granger wasn't laughing, he was deep in thought. Here was a lad who still sat in those ridiculous old oversized clothes yet was quite the catch for his daughter. Harry was courteous, kind, generous to a fault, courageous, rich, famous yet modest and even has girls all over the country crushing on him. The Dursleys had looked like their kind of people yet apparently treated Harry as if he was some form of pondlife.

The enigma that was Harry Potter was forcing Dan to look at things differently, even knowing the lad for less than twenty-four hours was

having a profound effect on the dentist. Not only had Harry made his daughter rich, he'd saved Hermione's life as well! How could any father object to that, especially when a glance was all that was needed to see they both really cared for each other?

Dan turned his attention to the shabbily dressed man sitting at the table. This professor was going to be in and out his home all summer so he decided to get to know the man before making any judgments. Harry was having an influence on Daniel Granger just by being here.

"Professor Lupin, I understand from Harry you were a good friend of his parents? What were they like?"

Remus suddenly had everyone's attention as he thought on how to answer. "That's a very broad question that I could talk all day on and still miss things out. I went through seven years of Hogwarts with them as we were all Gryffindors, Lily and I were the prefects. I would consider both the dearest friends I ever had. Lilly was like Hermione in that her parents were non-magical, this didn't hold her back though as she was the most brilliant witch I've ever met."

Harry was sitting listening about his parents with his new girlfriend on his knee, this morning was certainly picking up. "Mum sounds more like Hermione than you know."

"Well Harry here must only take after James in appearance, Lily wouldn't give your father the time of day until he stopped being a prat and grew up. Both would have loved to see you here today, your mum would have dragged you away for a talk about having a young lady on your knee while your dad would have been giving you the thumbs-up while telling you not to be in too many broom cupboards until you made the Quidditch team."

Hermione could see the mischief in the man's eyes but was desperate to ask why, if he was such a good friend, did Harry end up abandoned at the Dursleys? She didn't want to ruin the moment though but still came right back at him, "Harry's been the Gryffindor seeker for two years now, youngest in over a century! As to broom cupboards, since he grew up in one, we will be giving those a miss."

Amelia was quickly adding to the memories she wanted from Harry, "I think we should discuss your placement with your relatives and their treatment of you when I come back for the memories Harry."

Remus was confused, "What relatives? Harry is the last Potter and Lily only had a sister... He wouldn't? Harry, tell me Dumbledore didn't give you to Petunia?"

Harry couldn't lift his head to face anyone so Hermione answered for him, "Dumbledore left him on their doorstep with a note pinned to the blanket he was wrapped in."

Remus was on his feet without realising it, "But she hated magic and, because of that, Lily. She refused to have anything to do with your parents, wouldn't attend their wedding or your christening. There is no way your mum and dad would have arranged for you to be placed there."

Emma suddenly had the beginnings of an idea, "Can I take it from this you know the Dursleys Professor Lupin?"

"I've met them Mrs Granger, I wouldn't want to know them."

"How would you like to have dinner with them, here, Sunday evening?"

Remus slowly sat back down as a grin spread across his face, "I think I would like that very much Mrs Granger."

"Good, and its Emma and Dan. Would you like to join us Amelia? At the moment there is only Harry to prevent us murdering them and dumping the bodies on the local rubbish tip."

Amelia thought that would be a wonderful idea, "I'll come early and collect the memories, then I would be delighted to stay for dinner."

Remus also chipped in, "If I come early, then I could give the kids their first lesson. It shouldn't take long for Harry to give the memories and that would give you three time to view them while I keep these two busy."

Amelia came up with an idea to have any magic being performed at the Grangers ignored, she would have the building and grounds

declared a magical summer school. As Susan spent most of the summer in the company of her best friend, Hannah Abbott's name was also added to the list of students with Amelia saying she would bring them with her on Sunday.

Dobby popped into the room beside Harry, "Will your friends also be staying for dinner on Sunday Harry Potter sir?"

Harry looked at the excited little guy who obviously wanted him to say yes, "Could you manage dinner for all those people Dobby?"

"Oh easily Harry Potter sir, Dobby loves to be busy."

A quick glance at Emma got a nod, she wanted to meet more of their friends and the house being full of magic users would ensure the Dursleys had a pleasant evening.

"Ok Dobby, they will be staying for dinner."

Remus had baulked at the money Harry was now paying him but Amelia said he had to be paid the correct rate otherwise she couldn't complete the paperwork for the summer school. With the arrangements now made, both apparated away.

That only left the Weasleys to face, easy!

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The horcrux immediately knew something was very wrong, everything felt so alien to him.

"Don't worry, you'll soon get used to it. This is wonderful, I feel so much more powerful. I know you expected to be in control but that's never going to happen. You made a big mistake by hiding yourself in Gringotts. Goblins are too different to wizards for your soul magic to work on us. Without me willingly allowing you into my body, you would never have made it out of these caverns. I only accepted you because I wanted your knowledge and power, this was the only way to get it. I will go to this house and meet with any others but I won't be giving this power up."

The horcrux realised it was helpless, being used by this creature for its own ends. Trapped in this non-human body that was so different

it couldn't even think where to begin to try to wrestle control away from this deranged goblin.

The goblin was now laughing and out of control, the horcrux began to wonder if the joining had unhinged the beast or was it really this mad to begin with. "Oh yes, you really didn't think this scheme of yours through. Not to worry, Crappy will get us out of here. No one looks twice at Crappy, we could walk right out the front door and no one would notice us."

The goblins voice was now more of a growl, "They will find Crappymort a whole different kind of animal. I won't be the one shitting myself anymore, by the time I'm finished their bowels will empty at the mere mention of my name. I have no interest in humans or wizards but intend to rule over the goblin nation with a fist of iron. With your others lording over the rest, between us we'll rule the world!"

The horcrux was forced to admit it had met its match, this Crappy creature was a bigger megalomaniac than he ever was. His only hope was that his brother horcruxes had found more suitable hosts than he had and were powerful enough to defeat this creature, allowing him to join with the original soul. If not, he was in for a quite miserable existence.

-oOoOo-

Dobby dropped Hermione and her father off just outside the Burrow wards before returning to collect Harry and Emma. This was the first moment Dan had alone with his daughter to begin repairing some of the damage he had done yesterday. He was unsure how to begin but his wife's words from yesterday stuck in his brain, be the Dan Granger we both love, he decided to follow her advice and make a start now. "Can I assume from this morning that Harry has asked you to be his girlfriend and certain people here might not take to kindly to that news?"

Hermione was too busy smiling to have time to blush at her father raising that subject, she was Harry's girlfriend and that was enough to keep her smiling all summer! "I think our friends will be fine with it, they're used to Harry and me being together all the time. It's Mrs Weasley I'm worried about. Ginny has been raised on 'boy who lived' stories since she was a little girl, she saw herself as the

princess marrying her prince. Her mother is the one who read her those stories and I'm starting to wonder if she didn't believe them herself."

"You don't need to worry princess, that young man is totally besotted with you. Let your mum and me deal with the adults while you and Harry speak with your friends. After all, that's what we're here for."

Harry and Emma arrived with Dobby to find Hermione hugging her dad, Emma was pleased for both of them but ready for battle. She didn't think this visit to the Weasleys would turn into a war, more like the opening skirmish where both sides assessed the opposition's strengths and probed for weaknesses. Molly Weasley was an opinionated woman who may wish Harry had chosen her daughter but the lad didn't, he asked Hermione instead. Here was a lad who could have used his fame to play the field but, even in the short time she'd known him, Emma could tell that was something Harry would never do. Other than having the usual parent / teenager talk with Hermione, Emma had no intentions of interfering in their fledgling relationship. She would be damned though if she was going to stand back and watch someone else interfere. Emma supposed this would give her practice for Sunday night when manners dictated she would be forced to smile at Harry's aunt.

Molly came upon them first and squealed the instant she spotted Harry, the lad's feet almost left the ground as she crushed him in her arms. "Oh Harry, thank you again. I almost died when I saw the size of that thing!"

Harry was checking if his arms and legs still worked as he answered Molly. "So did I Mrs Weasley, so did I! We came to speak to Ron and Ginny, I hope you don't mind?"

"Harry, you know you're welcome here anytime."

Emma chose to ignore the thinly disguised barb aimed in their direction, she would have been drowned out anyway by the noise now issuing from inside the house. Ron, Ginny and the twins had been alerted by their mother's rather loud voice as they came clambering from different parts of the house, all also attempted to talk to Harry and Hermione at once.

Harry held his hands up for quiet. "Ron, Ginny, we need to speak to you. Sorry Fred and George but this is private."

"Hear that George, we're not wanted. Just because he can slay a basilisk..."

"A humungous basilisk..."

"Ok, a humungous basilisk he thinks..."

"With only a sword..."

"So, just because he can slay a humungous basilisk with only a sword, he thinks he can come here and tell us what to do!"

"Can't he Fred?"

This appeared to catch Fred on the hop, though with the twins you were never sure. "You're probably right George. Thanks for saving her Harry, there won't be a bludger getting within ten feet of you next year."

Harry didn't have the heart to tell them he wouldn't be in Hogwarts, far less Gryffindor next term. They didn't plan on dealing with that here and now. He and Hermione took the two Weasleys a walk in the direction of the orchard.

The two mothers were soon alone, watching their offspring preamble toward the trees as Arthur had practically kidnapped Dan to show him his muggle collections. A real live muggle to question was too good an opportunity for Arthur to miss.

That Harry was walking beside Ginny while Hermione spoke with Ron was purely coincidental, Molly though was reading a lot more into the situation. Her eyes were sparkling as she gushed, "Don't they make lovely couples?"

Emma deliberately chose to mishear the plump witch, "Yes, we really like Harry and couldn't be happier that he and Hermione are dating now. The fact that he's staying with us the entire summer will give Dan and myself a chance to get to know him better. The way Hermione always writes about him though, we feel as if we already know the lad."

Molly was devastated at that news and about to come back with a sarcastic comment when she heard Ginny shriek. Her daughter was now wrapped around a smiling Harry while Hermione was hugging a clearly stunned Ron. The four of them began making their way back, arm in arm and clearly very happy. Molly couldn't quite keep the smirk of her face, "It would appear that things have changed!"

Emma of course knew what had been said down there amongst the apples and pears but had no intention of informing Molly, this woman reminded her of those pushy mothers who force their kids into dancing, piano, or a multitude of other things their offspring clearly didn't want to do. She was living her life vicariously through her children and if Molly wasn't careful, they would all move out as soon as they were old enough to do so.

Molly was beaming at how happy her daughter looked, holding onto Harry's arm. "Have you something special you want to tell me Ginny?"

Ginny sprang into her mother's embrace, "Oh mum, it's a dream come true. Harry's just made us rich!"

Molly's jaw was now hanging open as her youngest son spoke, "It's true mum, Harry's sharing the money he's getting for selling the basilisk between us all."

Hermione now had her arm around her boyfriend and kissed him on the cheek. "Yeah, he's pretty special!"

Molly couldn't keep the venom or the jealousy out of her voice. "I understood Hermione was lying petrified in the infirmary, how does that warrant a share?"

Emma was about to rip this witch a new one when the smallest redhead beat her to it.

"Even petrified, Hermione did more to save me than Dumbledore. She's the one who worked out it was a basilisk and how it was getting about the school. She had it all written down and scrunched up in her hand. Without her, the boys would never have found me. She deserves a share more than I do."

Hermione found herself in Harry's arms as she spoke, the girl was quite proud that she kept her hurt from showing. "Ron, could you get my dad. Mum and I are taking Harry shopping, we'll see you on Sunday." The words had hardly left her mouth when Dobby popped them both away.

Ron was angry with his mother but stormed off to rescue his friend's father, Dobby was back standing beside Emma in seconds. He was also staring daggers at Molly and Emma began to question if it was wise to let the little guy anywhere near the Dursleys. She so wanted to get ripped into this woman but figured her silence would hurt more, both her kids had reacted angrily to her last comment. For Molly Weasley, that would be worse than anything Emma could say or do.

Dan came walking as fast as good manners allowed, clearly desperate to get out of here, Dobby soon obliged.

They left two kids who had the smiles wiped off their face by their mother's treatment of their friend, the Weasley household was in for a shake-up when Arthur learned what had happened.

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Tom and Riddle were both in control of the respective bodies and were spending their time sitting chatting, there really wasn't anything else for them to do until the original soul piece got here. Suddenly the door crashed open and the powerful goblin hit the room like a whirlwind.

Riddle found himself flat on his back and struggling to regain his feet, this old body was really difficult to control because everything was so much slower than he was used to. He glanced up at what was happening in the room and a surge of red-hot anger saw Frank retake control.

This creature had Sibyll pinned to a wall and was ogling her body like a starving man sitting down to a feast.

Crappy was elated, "Is this the best the great Lord Voldemort can manage? I think I'll have to reconsider my decision to leave the human world alone. There appears to be no opposition and the scent of their females is rather appealing. You and I are going to

become close friends female so stop struggling and save yourself a lot of pain."

"Get your filthy paws off her!"

Crappy didn't even look in Frank's direction, he just laughed at the feeble old man. "The days of anyone telling me what to do are gone forever. From now on I'm the one who does the telling."

Frank's voice was very steady, "You will leave her alone or I will be forced to make you."

Crappy's expression turned vicious, "I hadn't intended to kill you but your death can serve as a warning to the female about what happens to those who disobey me. What kind of shit is that?"

The 'that' in question turned out to be a Second World War pistol that had been lovingly cared for. With a very loud bang, it spat its projectile toward Crappy at supersonic speed. At the distance involved, even someone with Frank's poor eyesight wasn't going to miss.

The bullet hit Crappy on his large forehead, punching easily through the bone and throwing his already dying body across the room. Black gunk was mixed with the blood that oozed from the killing wound.

Due to their extremely close proximity to the event, both remaining horcruxes were thrown deep into unconsciousness as the effect of killing their brother was felt. The pulse radiated out from the manor, leaving Frank and Sibyll in total control. Sibyll looked lovingly toward Frank, sitting on the floor with the smoking gun held steadily and unwaveringly aimed at the unmoving goblin.

"Frank, you saved me!"

"I don't know what that thing was but it had no right to lay its paws on you. That's no way to treat a lady."

Sibyll helped Frank to his feet before kissing him passionately, "This lady has every intention of rewarding her knight. Come with me Sir Galahad and claim your prize!"

Sibyll led a beaming Frank in the direction of her bedroom, the old man was hoping he could remember what he was supposed to do next. Crappy lay discarded on the floor, ignored in death as he was in life.

-oOoOo-

Voldemort was elated but exhausted, he'd made it to Calais and planned a rest before attempting to possess an animal and stowaway on the ferry crossing to Dover. Being ejected from a body while crossing open water was not something he wanted to risk.

His elation vanished as quickly as his plans when the pulse hit, this meant he had only one horcrux left. He would just have to risk the crossing in the first creature that he could find, otherwise it wouldn't matter anymore as he would be to all intents and purpose dead. Someone must be systematically taking down all his carefully laid defences and destroying his soul pieces one by one. He had to conclude that if they got the rest, they must at least know what his one remaining horcrux was. If they also knew the where, it would be all over for the dark lord. Voldemort had never been so terrified in his entire life.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 8

Harry lay in his comfortable bed in the Grangers spare room with a wide grin on his face, memories of his day running through his head. While he'd stood there in his new pyjamas she had picked for him, his girlfriend had kissed him goodnight. The closet and drawers in his room were bursting to the seams with new clothes Hermione and her mum had spent hours choosing for him. Harry had no experience with the phenomenon that was shopping so had placed himself entirely in the capable hands of both Granger ladies. The joy on Hermione's face as she found something she thought he looked good in was worth every penny and minute spent shopping, the new clothes were just a welcome by-product of the whole enjoyable experience.

Her parents were now insisting he call them Emma and Dan as Harry got to experience how a real family lived. Astonishingly, he'd been asked for his input on where they would be going on holiday. Since he'd never been anywhere other than his trips to Scotland and a certain castle, Harry had nothing to offer. As long as Hermione was there, Harry didn't really care where they went. He actually felt as if he was on holiday just staying here. Hermione had suggested waiting until they got some information about where the prospective magical schools were, they could then maybe holiday near one and check it out.

Harry was lying in bed but was much too excited to sleep, even the prospect of having the Dursleys over for dinner couldn't dent his good mood. He had pleasant thoughts of Dobby dropping a cake on his Aunt Petunia's head before his mind turned to the girl who was asleep across the hall from him, his eyes finally closed but his wide grin remained.

-oOoOo-

Molly Weasley was also having trouble sleeping but it wasn't excitement keeping her awake, more the unaccustomed surroundings and the lack of her husband lying next to her. When a tearful Ginny had described what happened, Arthur had gone into a rage of epic proportions. None of the family had ever seen him so angry.

He had turned to face her and used his head of house voice, this time her knees had trembled in fear. "I gave you specific orders not to interfere, there was no room for misunderstandings. Would you care to explain why you chose to deliberately disobey me? Why you chose to upset the very people responsible for us still having a daughter? I demand an explanation of why the people who just gave our two youngest children a life changing gift left here before I could even thank them. Did you at least say thank you?"

Molly had no answers to any of her husband's questions so could only keep quiet as her entire family aligned themselves behind the people she had so effectively chased away. Things were so bad that even Percy spoke against her.

"Ginny had four brothers at Hogwarts and we all failed her, Ron redeemed himself but the fact remains the Weasley boys let someone hurt their baby sister. Hermione solved a puzzle that stumped Dumbledore and nearly lost her life doing it. We all know what Harry and Ron achieved, the front page of the Prophet informed the world of their deeds and I for one am very proud of my younger brother. I am ashamed of you mother. When these people came to call, bringing unbelievable news with them, they not only didn't get shown the proper Weasley hospitality but you insulted one of the people responsible for saving Ginny's life."

Fred found himself agreeing with his elder brother, "Make no mistake here, when you insult Hermione, you insult Harry."

George had more to add, "It's worse than that, insult Harry and he may forgive you eventually. Insult Hermione and you've made an enemy for life."

Ron knew them best so his father was particularly interested in what he had to say. "George is right and Hermione is exactly the same with Harry. I don't think this could be any worse, we're supposed to be going over there tomorrow and staying for dinner. What am I supposed to say to my best friends?"

Ginny had a fresh flood of tears at that. "I can't go, how could I possibly face them?"

At that, Arthur's features hardened as he turned back to face his wife again. "You will write a formal letter of apology to Miss Granger

that Ginny will give to Hermione tomorrow. I will write an apology from house Weasley to House Potter for any slight cast by my family. Ron, you will be my representative tomorrow." The Weasleys didn't buy into the beliefs that being pureblood automatically made you better than anyone else, it didn't mean they rejected all the customs. Ron would be representing house Weasley tomorrow and would have to keep it formal as he waited for Harry's response.

Molly thought her chastisement was over until she discovered all her things had been moved into Bill's old room, this was the first time this had ever happened and she was heartbroken. The men in the family just didn't understand she only wanted what was best for her daughter, by giving Ginny that money Harry had just made her daughter's prospects worse. There would be boys and men the length and breadth of the country turning their attention to little Ginny Weasley, knowing that if they could sweep her off her feet, all that money and the young girl would be theirs. Magical law would see all her possessions under the control of her husband and his family, this was why she had filled Ginny's head with tales of the boy-who-lived. Harry Potter was very wealthy but had no family. Molly was sure that when Ginny snagged him, she would be able to influence the lad through Ginny.

Molly had known exactly who he was that morning in the station. How could she not, the boy was the spitting image of his father. She'd been overjoyed when Ron had befriended him, that result was way better than she could have hoped or planned for. Keeping a stern face when they stole the car to bring Harry Potter to the Burrow was very hard when inside she was jumping for joy. Then he had saved Ginny's life, fighting a basilisk and you-know-who in the process. Why couldn't anyone else see it? These two were fated to be together but sometimes fate needed a little nudge. Molly was prepared to give that nudge, her family would soon see the error of their ways when Ginny and Harry were together. She knew this would make Ginny the happiest girl in the world. Molly was a mother who wanted what was best for her daughter, in this case that was clearly Harry Potter.

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Albus Dumbledore was also having trouble sleeping and the same person, namely Harry Potter was at the root of his insomnia as well. Since that night in the infirmary, his dealings with Harry could be

categorised as one step forward and at least three steps back. The boy's intentions to leave Hogwarts was more than a backward step though, it would be an unmitigated disaster that Albus couldn't allow to happen. He winced as he remembered Minerva's reactions to the news, he thought it would be better coming from him rather than Harry's owl requesting transfer details. To say she was displeased would certainly be an understatement and she laid the blame entirely at his feet.

The Hogwarts board of Governors had also acted swiftly, both he and Minerva were summoned to appear before them on Tuesday. Should Harry Potter have become the boy-who-left by then, Albus was under no illusions that his fate would be the same. It might not be of his own choosing but he would be leaving Hogwarts too.

Albus had long ago learned the best way to handle problems was one at a time, Harry Potter's continued presence at Hogwarts was top of the list. He would have to give that matter his undivided attention.

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Tom had no problem sleeping, quite the opposite in fact. The goblin having a grip of Sibyll when Riddle shot the creature appeared to amplify the effect of the horcrux being destroyed. The magical pulse hit him with much greater force than it did when travelling on the train. Tom reckoned it was the nearest thing to unconsciousness his form could experience. Taking control of Sibyll's body once more, Tom could instantly tell they were lying in bed but something felt different. He opened his eyes and the sight that greeted him scared this portion of his soul for eternity. He began to scream in Sibyll's high pitched voice before gladly relinquishing control of the body, he needed a deep, dark hole to hide in while trying to scourge this from his memory.

Frank awoke in bed beside a woman, a woman he'd made love to last night. He may have been a bit rusty but with such a willing partner they'd both been very happy with the results. Now he lay there smiling and watching 'his woman' as she woke. Frank was just about to say 'Good morning beautiful' when Sibyll appeared to realise and obviously regret what they'd done last night, she began to scream at him. He should have known this was too good to be true, Frank Bryce was used to life's knocks. That didn't mean her

screams didn't pierce his heart, deflating his happiness like a burst balloon. Frank started to get up before he felt a gentle hand on his arm, the screaming had also stopped.

"Frank, I'm so sorry dear. That wasn't me but Tom. I was enjoying lying here, feeling your warmth and dreaming of how wonderful last night had been when he took over. Apparently Voldemort isn't as narcissistic as I thought! I don't want you to leave Frank, you've saved me in more ways than you know. I want you to stay here with me and show Tom what he missed last night, if he doesn't like it then he's welcome to leave. I've spent way too many years sleeping alone in that castle, I have no intention of sleeping alone from now on."

Frank wasn't sure if that was a declaration of love, lust or independence from the person in their heads. To him it didn't really matter which one it was, for the first time ever someone wanted Frank Bryce in their life. That she was a lovely younger woman who wanted him sexually as well fairly had his blood pumping around his aging arteries. As the two naked bodies became intertwined, neither noticed how much easier it was to control their visitors when they were together in the truest meaning of the word.

Riddle felt ill at the back of Frank's mind, didn't this bitch realise what age his host was? He couldn't quite grasp the irony of going through all that effort and pain to make himself immortal only to die of heart failure or a stroke between the thighs of some over-eager female. Frank and Sibyll may not have noticed it yet but he had, the closer these two got then the less influence he had on his host. They couldn't get much closer than they were at this moment and Riddle wondered if he could have this memory obliterated when they eventually joined together with the master soul piece. The thought of then having both memories after joining, from being on top and bottom, was a distinctly displeased one. Riddle was beginning to question the entire idea of creating horcruxes, he was starting to realise there were worst things that could happen to you in life than death. Being trapped inside this old body while it laboured away with an ugly female was definitely one of them, Riddle's only form of consolation being that he was so glad he wasn't in Tom's position.

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Amelia hadn't slept much last night either, she'd spent most of it doing a lot of thinking. Today might change the course of her life, it might change the course of many lives but that's what needed to happen. She rang the Grangers door bell, hoping she hadn't overstepped the mark. Her chances of pulling this off were slim without unduly antagonising these good people.

Dan answered the door to find Amelia was not only early, she'd brought reinforcements.

"Hello again Mr Granger. This is my niece Susan and her friend Hannah, the lady on my left is Madam Augusta Longbottom with her grandson Neville, who I know you were expecting. Madam Longbottom is on the Hogwarts school board and I took the liberty of inviting her along because she is very interested in what we're going to see here today. I also know we're early but I wanted to get started, I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all Madam Bones, Madam Longbottom you're very welcome. Please come in."

Augusta's eyebrows were raised already. This was an old house yet clearly muggle, still a house elf appeared at her side to take her cloak. All very confusing and, if even a little of what Amelia had alluded to was true, things were only going to get more confusing as the day progressed. Harry and Hermione greeted their friends and again Augusta was surprised at how pleased they were to see Neville. Perhaps her grandson would benefit from these lessons after all.

Emma was being introduced to everyone as Amelia spoke, "As I said to your husband, I know we're early but we're really keen to see these memories. I brought a departmental pensieve with me."

While Emma was assuring her that was fine, Hermione raised a point that she had been pondering. "Madam Bones, don't you think it would be better if we all saw the memories together? Then you and Madam Longbottom could ask any questions you wished."

It was Augusta who answered, "My grandson told me you were very smart Miss Granger and I'm pleased to see him being proven correct. For too long the students of Hogwarts have had their views ignored, I thought the campaign you and Mr Potter initiated at Hogwarts was

sheer genius. Certain members of the board have been campaigning for his dismissal for years, it took a student led revolt to achieve what we couldn't. Very well done."

Hermione was now blushing as everyone made their way through to the dining room where Amelia placed her pensieve on the table. It was set to project the scene above the stone basin to allow everyone present to view the memories.

"Where do you wish to start Mr Potter?" Amelia asked.

Harry wasn't sure but as usual Hermione had a suggestion to offer. "Why don't you just show Voldemort's attempts to kill you for now? We can add more as we go along."

This comment had Augusta's full attention, "Attempts? Plural? Just how many attempts are we talking about here Mr Potter?"

Harry thought for a moment before giving his answer, "Well, since I started Hogwarts I count five. I didn't include the time we faced the troll because, although we were very lucky to get out of that in one piece, that wasn't specifically aimed at me."

It was a shaken Amelia who took over, five attempts in two years had shocked her to the core. Not once had any word of this come to her department, she was now more determined than ever to achieve what she planned here today. "I think Miss Granger has a very good point there, let's start with the first one."

Harry was trying not to smile as he answered, "Perhaps you would be better with Hermione's memory of the event, I was too busy hanging on for dear life to see what was happening around me."

Hermione was blushing again, "I don't think that's a good idea Harry."

Neville was having none of it, he knew this story and wanted to see it. "I think it's a great idea, I can't wait to see Snape's robes set on fire!"

The decision was then unanimous, everybody wanted to see that.

Dan watched as Harry was tossed about the sky, clearly in danger of losing his grip and life. Looking on as his daughter figured out what was happening and then took drastic steps to save Harry was a revelation to the man. His authority loving daughter had just set fire to a professor's robes! It would appear where Harry was concerned, Hermione was prepared to do anything.

The image of Snape dancing about, trying to extinguish the flames had Neville laughing like a hyena. Unfortunately the next memory put a sudden stop to that, the instant his gran saw them in the forbidden forest at night she exploded.

"Kindly explain to me why you were there, accompanied by only the gamekeeper?"

Neville was stuttering like mad while trying to find an answer, pinned by the formidable woman's gaze so Harry tried to help his friend. "We were assigned detention there by Professor McGonagall. Something was harming the unicorns and we were supposed to help Hagrid discover what it was."

This explanation didn't appear to help and things only got worse when Hagrid split them up. "I shall be having a serious word with Minerva McGonagall about this."

Watching as Harry had to be saved by a centaur from the thing that killed the unicorn increased Augusta's anger while terrifying Susan and Hannah, Neville was a bit green about the gills too.

The next memory certainly didn't help matters any either. Amelia had been taking notes since they began, her hand began to speed up the instant she spotted Fluffy. Neville instantly identified the devil's snare while Harry's skill on a broom as he chased the key had Dan convinced he would be sticking with golf. There were tears in quite a few eyes as Harry and Hermione had to leave the injured Ron and push on with their task. Dan erupted at what came next, "That's a troll? That's what tried to kill you in a toilet? This isn't a school, it's a nuthouse!"

The most poignant thing for Emma though was watching Hermione hug Harry as he was forced to go on alone, it was clear to her that even then her daughter thought the world of the young man who so recently became her boyfriend. Knowing what was coming next, she

wasn't in the least surprised to see Hermione slip onto Harry's lap and wrap her arms around him. Just talking about this event before had clearly upset the boy, how much worse would it be having to watch it back with everyone in the room?

Susan and Hannah noticed Hermione move and tried not to react, both had expected these two would end up as a couple but it had still hurt when they heard the news yesterday from Amelia. All that was instantly forgotten the second professor Quirrell removed his turban, both girls screamed in fright. Again, knowing Harry survived didn't seem to help anyone's nerves.

Hermione held Harry tight and was whispering comfortingly in his ear as the confrontation reached the conclusion she knew was coming, with Quirrell melting and screaming in agony the memory finally ended when Harry passed out from Magical exhaustion.

There was total silence for a few moments as everyone contemplated what they'd just watched, there was a general sigh of relief when mugs of hot chocolate appeared on the table before them.

By the expressions on the two adult witches' faces, Emma was certain she was not the only one wishing for a drink with slightly more kick to it than what was in front of her. After her first sip though that opinion changed, the bitter dark chocolate was laced with more than a hint of brandy. Emma was left wondering what you had to do to get a house elf working for you, Dobby appeared to know what she wanted before Emma did!

Amelia was also grateful for the taste of brandy in her chocolate drink, soon she was going to have to ask these people to do something they clearly didn't want to. Without their help though, it was going to be a hopeless case. Harry's memories were proving to be a double edged sword, making one of her goals a lot easier while the other was now practically impossible. She noticed her niece looking over her mug at Hermione holding Harry and hoped Susan wouldn't be too disappointed. From what Amelia had just watched, Harry Potter had made his choice at least a year ago.

Augusta and Amelia both wanted to know what happened after that confrontation with Quirrell / Voldemort.

Harry couldn't quite hide his disgust, "We were given some house points then I was shipped back to my prison with my relatives for the summer. Other than that, I have no idea. The only contact I had outside Privet Drive was when the ministry sent me an underage use of magic warning for something Dobby did."

Hermione wanted her boyfriend to get everything off his chest, she knew how much pain he carried around with him. Today was a perfect opportunity to rid him of some of that burden. She asked him if he could show some memories of his time at Privet Drive, Harry was clearly reluctant to do this but Hermione pushed a little more. "The Dursleys project an image of respectability that is very convincing, I want my dad to see what the people he invited into our home are really like when they think nobody is watching."

Dan caught the end of that as he'd just returned from answering the door to Professor Lupin. This was a very convincing argument to Harry and, with Hermione still sitting on his knee for support, he decided it was time for the pampered prince Potter illusion to be laid to rest once and for all. He didn't want to show anything too terrible though so settled on two memories.

A seven-year-old Harry was awakened by someone jumping on the stairs and shouting 'time to get up freak!' when Harry turned on the light there were gasps all around as his 'room' became clearly visible, it was also clear from the sound of a bolt being drawn back the child was locked in there. Harry was then very busy, rushing about cooking a mountain of food for everyone else's breakfast while he received no more than a bit of dry toast for his labours.

The next memory showed a twelve-year-old Harry lying on what was no more than a cot, the bars on his window that imprisoned both him and Hedwig were clearly visible. When the watery soup and chunk of stale bread were passed through the flap fitted to his bedroom door, there was murder in the air at the Grangers home. Watching while the boy shared his meagre meal with the beautiful owl, apologising for not having anything better to give the bird was heart wrenching.

A sobbing elf appeared, "Dobby is so sorry that he caused those people to treat the great Harry Potter like that, Dobby wishes permission to punish himself for being a bad elf."

Hermione moved off Harry's knee as he hunkered down to try and comfort his distressed little friend. The significance of this move was not lost on Amelia or Augusta, for a wizard of Harry's position and rank to do this was unheard of. "Listen to me Dobby, you were trying to save my life. They have been trying to make me feel like a freak for as long as I can remember. They would just have found another excuse to punish me, either that or made one up. They are not nice people Dobby."

The time it took Harry to calm Dobby had allowed tempers to cool but also attitudes to harden, the Dursleys were in for one hell of a dinner party.

Remus though couldn't contain himself. "Harry, I know your parents wouldn't have sent you there. For various reasons, neither I nor your godparents were able to raise you but there were other options laid out in their will. They had faced Voldemort on three occasions, they understood how dangerous the times were and had made preparations."

Amelia interrupted, "Mr Lupin, I have researched this matter in an official capacity. The Potter wills were sealed by our chief warlock, Albus Dumbledore, allowing him to do whatever he wanted with Harry. I'm head of the DMLE yet I don't have the authority to read those wills."

Emma was shaking her head at the power the old wizard wielded in the magical community, "Madam Bones, you are making a very good case here for us leaving the country. If there was a magical school in the south of France our decision would be an easy one."

Augusta reluctantly supplied the information, "There is, it's called Beauxbatons!"

Harry just glanced at Hermione, "Guess we need to add French lessons to our summer work then?"

Hermione smiled at him, "I can already speak French though my written grasp of the language needs a lot of work. Mum and dad are both fluent and have dreamed of opening a practice there for years."

It was Neville who voiced all their fears, "You're leaving Hogwarts?"

Harry nodded, "It's looking that way Neville, I can't trust Dumbledore anymore and attending Hogwarts puts me under his control for almost ten months of the year. Madam Bones, I can show my memory of the chamber and by that time Ron should be here. We really need his take on what happened in the infirmary, neither mine nor Hermione's memories would be any use."

Amelia asked if he could supply the memory from when they approached Lockhart and two young witches had their crush on the handsome professor torn down and trampled upon. They were given a unique chance to see the difference between a real hero and a peacock who'd pretended he'd the 'heart of a lion'. The three students were now worried about returning to Hogwarts without Harry, he'd saved the school twice and none of them had any confidence in Dumbledore being willing or able to do the same.

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Molly watched as her daughter got dressed to leave for the Grangers, even though Ginny deliberately didn't look in her direction, Molly couldn't help but comment.

"Ginny dear, why don't you wear your pretty blue dress? You look really lovely in it."

Ginny was not amused at her mum's suggestion, seeing right through her ploy. "Mum, I am going to the Grangers to get a lesson in defence, not play 'please notice me Harry!' With Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott and Luna there two, it could get a bit dangerous if we all make a play for Harry. Especially with his girlfriend there as well, Hermione can be quite scary when she has to be." The sarcasm went right over her mother's head though.

"You can't let a little competition put you off, if you want something then you need to go for it."

Ginny was becoming exasperated with covering the same ground over and over again. "Mum, what you fail to understand is that with Harry, there is no competition. He's made his decision and neither Ron nor me think he'll be changing his mind anytime soon."

Molly chuckled at her child's naivety, "He's only just becoming a teenager so a lot can happen in the future, especially if you really want it to!"

Ginny went so pale her freckles stood out almost black at the unspoken insinuation. "You put a potion anywhere near Harry Potter and I'll never forgive you. I actually agree with Percy, I'm ashamed of you mother."

Ron saved this blowing into a full-scale argument by shouting up the stairs, "Ginny, I'm calling Dobby now."

She brushed past her mother, glad to get away from the burrow for a while. The young girl had learned her lesson with that bloody diary though, this was too big for her to handle so she needed to talk to an adult about her mother. If she told her dad what her mum had hinted at, the entire family could end up broken, he was sure to go mental. Ginny wished Charlie or Bill were here, a letter wasn't going to be any good for what she needed to say.

Her brother and Dobby were waiting for her at the bottom of the stairs, Ginny Weasley was about to visit a muggle house for the very first time. Knowing Harry Potter was never going to be boring.

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Luna had just been introduced to everyone when Dobby arrived back from the Burrow, Harry and Hermione went to greet their friends when they got a shock, Ron was almost standing to attention.

"Mr Potter, I have a letter here from the head of the Weasley family, our father, that is addressed to you." Ron held the letter straight out in front of him and Harry was at a loss, thankfully Luna had spotted his predicament.

The little blond was soon at his side, speaking quietly while passing on instructions. "This is pureblood customs here Harry, you have to acknowledge Ron as his father's representative, take and read the letter before supplying your answer. Only then can Ron relax and be himself again."

Harry nodded to Luna and couldn't miss the expression of relief on his friend's face. "Thank you Mr Weasley, if you just give me a minute to read this then I'll give you an answer."

Hermione was desperate to know what the letter said but, since this was between house Weasley and Potter, she daren't interfere.

Harry's brows went down as he was reading, a clear indication that he wasn't happy about something. "Mr Weasley, I wasn't the one who was insulted therefore I'm not the one who should be receiving an apology."

Ron had expected nothing less, "Mr Potter, my sister has a personal written apology for Miss Granger." Ginny stepped forward and handed an envelope to Hermione, she read the handwritten note and looked toward Harry to see how to proceed. He clearly indicated it was her show, she was the one insulted so she had to be the one deciding whether to accept the apology. Hermione also knew for certain that, should she not accept this apology, Harry would do exactly the same.

"Thank you Mr and Miss Weasley. Kindly inform your mother I accept her apology."

Harry responded in kind, "Please inform your head of house that house Potter accepts their apology for the slight on my girlfriend."

Ron and Ginny visibly relaxed, "Thanks Luna, I could see Harry didn't have a clue what was going on there and you rescued us."

Emma was now reading both letters and nodded her head in satisfaction. She was now glad she hadn't ripped Molly Weasley a new one, it must have hurt like hell for the bossy woman to write that apology.

Harry now had his arm around Ron's shoulders as he led him in the direction of the dining room, "Mate, I need you to show your memory of that night in the infirmary. We also need to have a talk because I don't think either Hermione or me will be going back to Hogwarts, I just can't trust Dumbledore anymore."

They had reached the dining room and Ron recognised both witches and said 'hi' to their classmates while working over what Harry had just said. "You really think things are that bad?"

"It's actually worse than we thought, Dumbledore has been keeping secrets from everyone. We're expecting Hedwig back shortly with the papers from McGonagall and hopefully my relatives will sign them tonight. We expect Dumbledore to try to stop me leaving but I've had enough of a school headmaster trying to run my life."

Amelia offered her thoughts on the matter. "I think the question I would like to know the answer to is why he feels the need to control your life. With all his other jobs, you'd think he would have enough to be getting on with."

Harry glanced toward his friends before commenting, "We actually know the answer to that but I think we should see Ron's memory first. It will show how much Dumbledore has been hiding and we had practically force the information from the old git."

Emma was in tears while Dan appeared ready to commit murder at the sight of Hermione petrified on the bed, both couldn't help but notice Harry sitting there holding her hand and talking with their daughter. As sleeping Harry's convulsions started immediately he was moved from Hermione's side and everyone watched in horror at Dumbledore's revelations. When he proclaimed Harry would have to be stopped from leaving the castle if he lost the battle with Voldemort, Hermione's answer was louder than she intended. "Over my dead body you old bastard!"

Not one person present doubted her conviction, watching as she fought her way to his bed while still barely conscious herself cemented that opinion. The change in Harry couldn't have been more pronounced and the tenderness that Hermione wiped the vile gunk that oozed from his scar had the two young Hufflepuffs and the young Ravenclaw present unknowingly agreeing with the sentiments Ginny had expressed to her mother earlier. There never was nor would there be a competition for the affections of Harry Potter, Hermione had that position all wrapped up.

Amelia was on her feet before she even noticed she'd moved, the revelation about soul pieces had the head of the DMLE in a rage. The indication that Dumbledore was aware of this and had failed to

pass that information along had her swearing to skin the old bastard alive. She was pacing up and down like a caged lion, her notes forgotten for the moment.

As the memory finished playing Harry began speaking at once, hoping to distract two parents from the fact that he had been lying in bed with their daughter. "A prophecy was made concerning me and the dark lord, we've looked at it from every angle and are not sure of the implications. Dumbledore and Voldemort though have apparently no doubts. Death eater Snape heard the first part and told his master, that's why my parents were killed and I walk about with this scar. That's why Dumbledore is so insistent on running every part of my life, he thinks only he knows what's best for me. Strangely, he's been absolutely no help with my supposed task, just look at the last two defence professors he's chosen."

It was a nervous Neville who asked the question, "What is your task Harry?"

"Well Dumbledore is convinced that only I can kill Voldemort."

Dan and Emma had already heard this and thought it was ludicrous, they were pleased to see that was a view shared by the other adults present. Remus was barely controlling his temper, "James and Lily's deaths not enough for him? He wants to wipe out the entire Potter family."

Susan was troubled by something so decided to ask, "We've just watched Harry defeat him three times, counting the one when he was a baby that makes four. Surely he must be gone now?"

Amelia shook her head, "I don't know Susan but you can bet I'll be finding out. Remus, do you think you could take them for that lesson now?"

Remus understood there were things going to be discussed here that Amelia didn't want the kids to hear, Hermione led them out to the enclosed back garden.

Amelia sat there thinking it was hopeless but she had to make the attempt. "Mr and Mrs Granger, what I'm going to ask you might seem crazy but I would like you to hear me out before throwing me

out. Is there any possible way you could leave your daughter enrolled at Hogwarts?"

Dan had found himself liking Amelia Bones but clearly she was as nutty as the rest of them. Before he could jump down her throat, she continued her spiel.

"Please let me explain, I understand sending Hermione to a Hogwarts with Dumbledore in charge is a total non-starter. Susan will be joining Hermione and Harry in France if he doesn't get booted out. I'm talking about Hogwarts under new management, someone whose only concerns are for the children's safety and education. A person who you will hopefully trust with the care of your daughter."

Dan was quick to cut Amelia off, "I'm sorry but I have very little confidence in McGonagall's ability to be much better, she's been embroiled in this mess almost as much as Dumbledore. She's those kids head of house and should have been looking out for them."

Amelia nodded in agreement, "Minerva's been working with Dumbledore too long, she can't differentiate between the legend and the man anymore."

It was Augusta's turn to ask. She had a vested interest in this new headmaster since she was on the board and her grandson was a student. "Just who did you have in mind Amelia?"

Amelia took a deep breath. This was it, time to put up or shut up. "Me!"

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Voldemort was exhausted but getting closer to his destination, he was forced to rest for the remainder of the day but would hopefully make Riddle Manor tomorrow, the next day at the very latest. He drew strength from this thought, he could have a living, breathing body soon. Voldemort was long past the stage of caring what that body looked like, he just couldn't wait to be able to perform magic once again.

A/N Thanks for reading.

Chapter 9

Remus attempted to pair the kids up for some defence exercises and immediately hit a couple of unforeseen problems.

Harry was first to throw a spanner in the works, "Excuse me professor, Madam Pomfrey wouldn't allow me to perform any magic since that thing was removed from behind my scar. She wanted to give my magic time to settle and was worried I might have control issues when I started using it again. I really don't want to be firing curses at anyone until I'm sure its fine."

This gave Luna the courage to speak out as well, "Sir, I've had control issues my entire first year. I don't think I'm ready to be firing curses at anyone either."

Remus transfigured a couple of bushes into practice dummies for them to fire spells at while he worked initially with the other six. Ron paired with Neville while Hannah and Susan did the same, leaving Ginny and Hermione as the final pair.

The littlest redhead immediately attempted to apologise for her mother's behaviour yesterday but Hermione wasn't blaming her friend in the slightest. "Ginny, you had nothing to do with that, I hope you'll understand though if Harry and I don't spend much time at the burrow this summer. I suppose this is what I can expect since I'm now Harry Potter's girlfriend."

Ginny could tell Hermione was trying to make a joke of it but that her mother's comment still hurt.

Hermione was now becoming all conspiratorial, having a girl she could actually talk to was a novelty for the Gryffindor girl. No one in their right mind would ever tell Parvati or Lavender anything of consequence, it would be all over the school minutes later. "I'm more interested in the story between Ron and Luna though, spill it!"

Ginny was indeed happy to be talking about something else, "Well Luna's liked Ron for years, it's beginning to look like my brother may have finally noticed her."

Ron was now so busy noticing Luna that Neville almost caught him with a spell. His reason was obvious as they followed his gaze,

Harry was currently behind Luna and holding her wrist as he attempted to help the young witch control her casting.

Both girls were giggling at Ron's behaviour before Hermione got an idea, "How about giving Ron a little push? You could say to him that..."

They had been paying so much attention to Ron and Luna, they never noticed that Professor Lupin was standing just behind them until he spoke. "So are we here to practice or spend the afternoon gossiping? Miss Granger, your boyfriend over there is paying me rather a lot of gold to teach you defence, I intend to make sure he gets his money's worth."

Suitably chastised, both witches quickly began demonstrating the spells they had been asked to perform.

Luna felt she had learned more about her magic in the last twenty minutes of one-on-one tutoring with Harry than she had last year at Hogwarts. He had a way of explaining things to her that just seemed to make sense. Luna was by no means casting like she was supposed to yet but, for the first time, she now believed she would get this under control.

Remus again interrupted unannounced, "Harry, both Miss Lovegood and I appreciate your help here but I want to see you cast a spell at that dummy. Can you cast a stunner?"

Harry drew his wand without thinking and fired off a stunner, the red beam hit the dummy squarely in its chest and blasted it past the group of adults who'd just stepped into the garden. It breezed through the temporary wards Remus had erected and only the Grangers stout fence halted the dummy's progress through the air.

Luna's eyes were nearly popping out her head, "I can understand why you didn't want to fire that at anyone Harry, my casting problems don't seem so bad now." The wide smile on her face robbed the words of any form of malice but Harry was too busy staring at the dummy he'd blasted to take offence.

Remus was also taken aback, he'd just witnessed the most powerful stunner he'd ever seen cast. That spell would have blasted through

his shields like they were tissue paper. How was he supposed to teach someone who was already more powerful than he was?

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The other three people in the room were all looking at Amelia as if she'd just went mad, at least they weren't shouting at her yet. She tried to explain her reasoning. "From what we've seen here today, Hogwarts is a total shambles at the moment and Dumbledore needs to go now. I'm assuming we're all here agreed on that point?" Three nods allowed Amelia to continue, "With Fudge in charge, the ministry is no better. My department arrests people only for Fudge to invent some reason why they couldn't possibly be guilty and set them free. I feel I can do more for our society as Headmaster of Hogwarts rather than being blocked at every turn as the head of the DMLE. Fudge would jump at the chance to get rid of me while appointing one of his lackeys in my place, discrediting Dumbledore at the same time would be all good in his book."

Emma showed Hermione wasn't the only smart one in the family, "That's all very well Amelia but why is it so important that Hermione goes to Hogwarts?"

Augusta decided to answer that one in her usual blunt fashion. "Because she's Harry Potter's girlfriend and he will follow her anywhere!" She then toned her voice down a bit to expand on her statement. "I don't mean to patronise here but you two can have no idea how important that boy is to us. You can't possibly know because you would have to have experience it. The darkness was destroying everything in its path and neither Amelia nor I would be sitting here today if it wasn't for that boy. We would both be dead, and so probably would you and your daughter. They were murdering muggleborns for sport and Hermione's first bout of accidental magic would have led them to your door."

Emma again went right to the heart of the matter, she was beginning to get angry now. "If Harry is so important to you, could someone please tell me how he was living in conditions like that at the Dursleys?"

Augusta's stern mask slipped and they could all see the pain that lurked there, "Watching that today was heartbreaking, we failed the child who saved us all. His godfather betrayed his parents and may

he rot in prison forever. Harry's godmother resides in the long-term spell damage ward at St Mungo's, she doesn't even recognise her own son far less her godson. Her husband is in the bed next to her, also in the same condition. Her husband is my only son and my grandson their only child. Neville is the last of the Longbottoms after me, just as Susan is the last of the Bones and Harry is the last of the Potters." This shocked Dan and Emma as much as anything they'd learned in the last few days. Augusta continued her attempt to explain the unexplainable. "Voldemort unleashed a civil war that almost destroyed a way of life until baby Harry Potter stopped him in his tracks. There is endless debate about how this was achieved by the child but no one disputes that it was done. If you take Harry Potter out of Hogwarts, out of Britain even then you take away our hope. Watching those memories today it was made clear to everyone that Harry will follow your daughter anywhere, and she would unquestionably do the same for him."

Amelia could only agree with everything Augusta had said, Voldemort had been systematically wiping out those who refused to join him until he came to an abrupt end. "Harry Potter is more than just a young boy to us, he's a symbol that the darkness can be defeated. I agree totally with Augusta that we failed him. For whatever reason that failure was engineered by Dumbledore, and I fully intend to see it stop now. I have searched and can't find any records of the Dursleys being listed as his guardians, I intend to raise that subject with them tonight. If necessary, I will petition for guardianship of him myself because he's never returning to that house."

Emma knew instinctively that Hermione would hate that, "Could you give me a minute to speak with my husband?"

Dan though was on the ball, "I think I know what you want to discuss dear and I agree. Harry is staying here for the summer and is welcome to extend that to as long as he wants. Whether he wants to take steps to legalise that in some form is a decision he and our family will sit down and discuss only if it becomes relevant."

Emma wanted to kiss her husband for that but he wasn't quite finished yet. "As to Hogwarts, I'm willing to consider that option if you can make the changes we discussed here. Wherever Hermione goes we will be closely monitoring the situation and won't hesitate to withdraw our daughter if her safety is threatened in any way. My

family will also react against anyone trying to force a solution upon us. We have the means and the ability to leave Britain for good and may still do so." Dan tried to soften the potential blow. "I mean no slight on your society or school, my job as a father is to do what's best for my daughter. I can promise you we will consider Hogwarts in our plans, if you can make that our best option it will save having to uproot our family."

Doing what was best for your family was something that both Augusta and Amelia agreed with wholeheartedly. "Mr Granger, I have spent thirty two years working hard to achieve the position I now hold. This is not something I'm giving up lightly. On my way up the ladder I had eight years in charge of auror recruitment and training so running a school won't be totally new to me. These children are the future of our world and nothing is more important than that. Fudge won't believe or acknowledge Voldemort isn't dead, Malfoy's gold will see to that. I can ensure our children are taught properly and in a safe environment, my alternative is to continue banging my head against a brick wall at the ministry."

All were impressed with Amelia's reasoning and commitment to her cause though she wasn't quite finished yet. "These memories that Harry supplied us should make it relatively simple to have Dumbledore dismissed from Hogwarts, quite simply his actions and inactions are indefensible. I'm hoping Augusta here will support my application for the vacant post."

"Amelia, there is no doubt you will be missed at the ministry but that will be Hogwarts gain, I can't think of anyone better suited for the position."

The four sat and started to bat ideas to and fro of the changes they would like to see made at Hogwarts until the doorbell rang again. Emma was worried that the neighbours must have noticed the flashes of light that had started to come from the back garden before Amelia assured her that Remus would have warded against anyone hearing or seeing anything unusual.

Dan returned with Professor McGonagall, the deputy headmistress was more than surprised to see Amelia and Augusta sitting in the Grangers drinking tea. That was until she spotted the pensieve sitting on the table and realised she could be facing a worse situation than she anticipated.

Augusta confirmed that suspicion within seconds, not even taking time to say hello. "Minerva, I would like you to explain why you gave first years detention, at night, in the forbidden forest?"

"I didn't!" Minerva held up her hand before anyone could contradict her and continued with her explanation. "I gave them detention in the castle under the supervision of Filch. Hagrid approached me and said it was partly his fault the children had gotten detention in the first place so asked if they could spend it with him. It never occurred to me he would lead them into the forbidden forest at night or I most certainly wouldn't have allowed it. I will still take responsibility for it though, even though I tore strips of Hagrid later, I should have checked what he intended first."

Dan also had other issues though. "What happened at the end of first year? The kids came to you looking for support and you sent them away with a flea in their ear!"

"The children came to me and spoke about the biggest secret in the school, most of the staff didn't know about it. I wanted to discourage them taking any further action while I contacted the headmaster. Albus arrived back just as Miss Granger emerged with an injured Mr Weasley to say that Mr Potter was still down there." Minerva almost broke into a smile when she remembered something. "I distinctly remember Albus telling your daughter to go to the infirmary, she of course ignored this and followed on to see if Mr Potter was alright."

Dan still wasn't satisfied. "Professor McGonagall, we also watched the memory from the infirmary. Why were we not told our daughter was petrified?"

"Dumbledore claimed it would start a panic if parents discovered what was going on, he was very angry that the story was all over the Prophet yesterday. We knew your daughter would be perfectly ok once we administered the antidote."

Emma tried to cut the woman a break, she knew this particular professor was Hermione's favourite. "Having watched that memory, it would appear that you and the headmaster had quite a few disagreements on his handling of things?"

Minerva's brows furrowed, "You could most definitely say that. His treatment of young Harry goes way beyond anything I've ever seen in all my time at Hogwarts."

Amelia wanted to work with Minerva so decided to let her see just how far Dumbledore had gone. "Minerva, take a seat. You're going to need it."

After watching the two memories from the Dursleys, Minerva was wiping her eyes with her handkerchief. She took a moment to compose herself before reaching into her bag. "When I received the note from Hedwig I decided to call myself and see if there was anything I could do to help. After watching that I will be leaving Hogwarts as well. This is a decision I have been considering since that night in the infirmary, those memories have just made my mind up. I couldn't look Dumbledore in the eye without spitting in his face. Here are the forms you requested and some prospectuses from other magical schools. I know the head of Beauxbaton and would gladly contact Olympia to arrange a visit over the summer."

Both Grangers accepted the folder she provided them with just as Amelia accepted the opening she was looking for. "Minerva, what if we could get Dumbledore out of Hogwarts? Would you consider staying?"

"I suppose it would depend on whether that could be achieved and who Dumbledore's replacement was. It's no secret I love teaching there but I have no wish to be headmistress!"

That drew a smile from Amelia and Augusta but Dan still had a frown on his face, something was still troubling him. "Professor, what did the kids do to earn a detention in that forest?"

"Em, they were caught leaving the astronomy tower when they should have been tucked up in bed."

The slight flush from McGonagall and the snickering coming from the other two witches told Emma she was missing something here. "What aren't you telling us?"

It was Amelia who answered, "I don't suppose things have changed that much since I left Hogwarts but the astronomy tower was the

favourite destination of courting couples. I have to say though, I've never heard of two first years being caught up there."

Dan was on his feet and heading for the back garden, the four ladies hot on his heels. They were greeted by the sight of a dummy flying past them at speed and smacking into the fence."

"From the looks of astonishment on everyone's faces, can I assume that's not supposed to happen?"

Minerva provided the answer to Emma's question. "Since that abomination was removed from Harry's head, his magical power has increased dramatically. He's already more powerful than the staff at Hogwarts, by the time he reaches his maturity Poppy expects he'll surpass even Dumbledore."

These facts made not one bit of difference to Dan Granger, "Harry Potter, I would like to know what you were doing with my daughter after curfew in the astronomy tower?"

Harry understood immediately the time Hermione's father was referring to, he also understood this was not a question he could duck. "Mr Granger, we were smuggling a baby dragon out the country so Hagrid wouldn't get into trouble for hatching the beast in his hut."

Everyone else gasped at this answer but Dan wore a wide smile, smuggling a dragon was infinitely more preferable to countless other possibilities he could think of. "Outstanding answer there Harry, and call me Dan!"

-oOoOo-

Voldemort felt the noose tighten around his neck and cursed himself for letting his guard down, he was within touching distance of Riddle Manor when the latest in a long line of episodes occurred. The creature's struggles became frantic as it slowly asphyxiated and Voldemort found himself as a spirit once more. He floated toward the muggle manor and hoped his remaining horcrux was waiting for him within. On entering the building the spirit heard two distinct voices talking with each other, what was going on?

The spirit was floating outside the door, trying to figure out how he was going to proceed when a female voice from inside the room spoke directly to him.

"Well, you took your bloody time! We've been patiently waiting in this dump so stop hanging about out there, get your arse in here."

Voldemort passed through the door, only to find an old man and a woman of indeterminable age waiting on him. The old man now spoke. "You took your sweet time getting here, you have no idea the torture we've had to endure. Please tell us there's another horcrux still to activate, otherwise we're left with that squib over there and this ancient muggle."

Voldemort didn't know what to say at the moment, he tried to answer as best he could. "You're both horcrux? I was expecting there to be only one here. I created five and definitely felt four being destroyed. How is this possible?"

The woman Voldemort now knew to be a squib spoke, "We were aware our original plan was to split our soul into seven. I'm from Hogwarts and he's from Gaunt's shack. What happened after that?"

"I was planning on creating one the night that Potter brat did something to me. Needless to say I haven't been able to create anymore since that Halloween."

The old muggle was becoming hysterical. "This was a bloody stupid idea dreamed up by a seventeen-year-old Hogwarts student. The most powerful wizard the world has ever known should have been able to come up with something a bit better than horcruxes. Even with one placed in the middle of a magical school, we still ended up with a squib! I think I would rather be dead than suffer this existence."

Voldemort was getting angry now, "I've been the one getting killed on an almost daily basis so don't go wishing for something you haven't yet tried. I was less than twenty yards from this house when the rabbit I was inhabiting stuck its head in a bloody snare. Don't talk to me about how hard life has been for you, at least you were alive!"

"Where was this snare?"

Voldemort was stopped mid-rant by this woman but her voice sounded different somehow.

She asked again, "Where exactly was this snare?"

This did not improve the spirit's temper. "It was about twenty yards from the front of the house, beside some bushes. What the hell has a dead rabbit got to do with anything?"

The old man slowly rose out his chair and bent to kiss the squib's cheek. "I'll get it love, and some vegetables from the garden. This will give you time to tell our guest how we do things around here."

The muggle smiled at the old squib, "I'll give you a hand as soon as you're back Frank."

Voldemort started shouting as the old man completely ignored him and ambled away. "Get back here this instant, I never said you could leave."

It was Sibyll who answered the screaming spirit, "Frank needs to get that rabbit before the foxes do, otherwise we've boiled potatoes for dinner again. The version of you in my head doesn't want me to accompany Frank down to the village in case we arouse suspicion and Frank's not really fit enough to haul groceries all the way back here by himself. That will all change now that you're here and we know there will be no more surprises in store."

Voldemort was at a total loss as to what was happening here, "Who the hell are you?"

She gave a girlish laugh before answering, "Oh sorry, how rude of me. I'm Sibyll and that gentleman who just left is Frank. Once we have the rabbit stew simmering away, both Frank and I will allow our visitors to speak with you. I can just about peel and cook vegetables while your cooking skills don't even stretch to that! We have this agreement where Frank does the cooking otherwise all four of us would starve to death. You wouldn't want that now, would you?"

Voldemort could almost feel that noose tightening around his neck again, this couldn't be right. "I demand you let me speak with my horcrux at once, be gone you squib!"

Sibyll infuriated the spirit more by just shaking her head at him. "Talking to yourself is not a good sign, believe me I know. We will allow you time to talk with yourself later but Frank and I will be having dinner together. I would recommend thinking through what you want to say now so you don't run out of time later."

"You will obey my commands or suffer the consequences bitch."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, heard it all before. You seem to forget I have a piece of you in my head, I know exactly what your options are. You could possess me and join with your other self, undoubtedly overpowering my will but condemning you to live the rest of your life without magic. It would also be a very short life. Should you choose that option, Frank would put a bullet into our head. If that happens, he would then turn that pistol on himself, ending your life forever."

The spirit sneered at her. "He wouldn't dare, no one takes their own life like that. Especially over a woman!"

Sibyll had the spirit's full attention now, she laid it on the line for him. "We were worried that there might be another horcrux out there that had possessed a magical body. Neither Frank nor I had any doubts what future awaited us should that have transpired. Our two visitors really hate us but we don't hold that against them. Frank and I led very lonely existences before we found happiness for the first time in our lives in each other's arms, nothing is going to take that away from us. Frank would shoot me rather than watch me become your puppet and I would want him to, there are some things in life worth dying for and Frank Bryce is mine."

Voldemort was struck dumb by these events. How these people could possibly overcome his horcruxes was the first question he intended to have answered when he was allowed to speak with his other self's again. The dark lord was incensed but totally helpless in this situation. As the squib had indicated, it would be easy to possess either of these two since he'd in effect already done so. She was also correct in her assumption that if he chose to do so, he would be stuck there forever. There wasn't a spark of magic between the three of them to work with, it was time to be a bit more Slytherin and wait to see what developed.

Voldemort watched the old muggle return and then both of them headed off into the kitchen. The rabbit was soon expertly skinned

and butchered, the meat placed in a large pot of water and vegetables that the squib had prepared. Both of them worked well together, preparing the meal before cleaning and tidying the kitchen. They then sat at the small breakfast table in the kitchen.

They had almost disregarded his presence while they worked but now the woman spoke to him. "We will now let our visitors out to play, all they have to do is ensure the pot doesn't boil over and spoil our dinner."

Since Voldemort now knew what to look for he instantly detected the changes as the old muggle spoke to him. "Now you see the life we are forced to lead, trapped inside these bodies that the hosts gain more control over with every passing day."

The woman then spoke directly to the spirit. "Don't think for a second her threats to shoot us are nothing more than a bluff. One of our horcruxes was overwhelmed by a goblin, a particularly psychotic goblin."

The old man shivered as he remembered the event. "Yes, he burst in here and grabbed her, pinned her up against the wall. My host didn't hesitate for a second, I was tossed from control of this body as if I was nothing and he killed that goblin without a second thought. They buried the body the following day."

Voldemort was forced to face the flaws in their plan. It would appear only the horcrux inside Hogwarts was fortuitously placed and even that backfired. He noticed the expressions of horror on both their faces and asked a question that slightly troubled him. "Why did they wait until the following day to bury the body? Are they religious or something? We need anything that could be used against them."

The woman had her hands covering her face as the old man appeared ready to vomit as he answered. "Let's just say they were otherwise occupied and leave it at that. We've both learned to retreat deep into their minds when they sit down to dinner and don't make another appearance until after breakfast. You'll certainly find out why if you hang about tonight. If they can ignore our presence in their heads, they won't give you a second thought. What are our options of acquiring you a new body and getting us out of these ones?" The desperation contained in the voice was unmistakable.

Voldemort had been thinking of little else but that very thing. "There is a ritual I could perform that requires 'bone of the father'. Can you assert enough control to force them into assisting?"

Both figures immediately shook their heads in tandem. Tom reminded Voldemort of a hen-pecked husband as he jumped to stir the pot, terrified of his host's reaction should he burn their dinner. The sight of one of his horcruxes standing there gesturing with a wooden spoon, dripping juices onto the floor, did more to portray the seriousness of the situation than words ever could. When the words came from the woman though, they were pretty devastating even without her use of the spoon.

"The closer these two get, the harder it is for us to exert any control over them. Since every single night they physically couldn't get any closer you might begin to understand the problem here. They also know from their continued contact with us not to believe a word we say or promise we make. While they want us out of their bodies they won't help us in any way. Both understand what the first thing we would want to do would be, put an end to their miserable lives as slowly and painfully as possible."

"What about approaching any of our followers for help?"

Voldemort stared at the old man, wondering if age had muddled his brain. "We daren't approach any of our followers for help. Any that are smart and powerful enough to help would surely use our weakness to take advantage of the situation. Can you imagine how Malfoy would react?"

Tom agreed, Malfoy was far too much like him not to make an attempt to rule. Only the dark lord's power and unflinching willingness to use it kept Lucius in line. The other side of the coin was against them as well. "Anyone we could trust not to betray us wouldn't have the brains or power to assist with the acquisition of a new magical body."

It was Riddle who mentioned the elephant in the room by voicing his fears. "We need to do something fast, I don't know how long I can endure this. Living in a body without magic is unbearable enough, throw in terrible eyesight, worse hearing and every step you take is bloody agony. At the moment it's a toss-up between the host

dropping dead while servicing this squib here or me losing the will to continue with this existence."

Tom's temper tantrum quickly followed. "This squib's eyesight is probably worse than yours. Unfortunately it's not bad enough to hide your face when he lies on top of her twice a bloody night. I want to vomit yet I have no body to perform that function, it would almost be a relief if the old bastard did shoot me. At least I'd die with the knowledge he hated killing her." She turned to Voldemort, "You think you've had it so tough with your rabbits and pigeons? She's already singing some appallingly happy tune in the back of my mind, anticipating her dinner date and then bedding her lover again. There is no shielding myself from this torture possible and nowhere to hide. If I could I would choose death this instant, it would be infinitely more preferable than being slowly driven insane by this woman."

Voldemort didn't know what to do next, his grand scheme for immortality lay in tatters with his remaining horcruxes wishing for a visit from death. He watched helpless as the hosts took control of the bodies once more and set the table for dinner. How did this happen? He was Lord Voldemort, a wizard so feared none dared say his name. Stirring rabbit stew for a muggle and a squib was so degrading!

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Rabbit stew wasn't on the menu at Malfoy Manor as Lucius hungrily surveyed his dinner guests, he wasn't in the habit of providing free meals. Apart from the three Malfoys, there were another three guests.

Severus Snape was soon going to find working for the Malfoys was infinitely more profitable than teaching at that school. Lucius had been suggesting this for the last few years but the potions master had always resisted. Dumbledore doing nothing while Harry Potter forced him out of Hogwarts had quashed any and all resistance. Severus would be a willing ally in his quest for revenge.

Fudge had once more earned the gold that Lucius diverted in his direction by having the latest charges against him dropped, unfortunately not before his name had appeared all over the Prophet. The Weasleys now found themselves sharing the joint top position of his shit list with the Potter brat.

The final guest was paying her first visit to the mansion and Lucius was delighted to notice her struggle not to be overwhelmed. The witch 's eyes held that mixture of greed and the willingness to do anything to get what she wanted that was so familiar to Lucius, every morning his reflection in the mirror showed the exact same thing. The casual display of wealth would have her safely in his pocket before she even knew it, just like dear old Cornelius was. Yes, Deloris Umbridge undoubtedly had a shocking sense of dress. It couldn't hide from Lucius that underneath she was a greedy, evil witch that could prove extremely useful to him in the future.

He was still formulating his plans to take down Potter and the Weasleys but already he knew his three dinner guests would be only too happy to help.

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Minerva was only too happy with adding her name to the guest list for dinner, she also added her name to the long list of people who 'wanted a word' with the Dursleys. Vernon and Petunia would be looking forward to an evening of social climbing, they were in for a bit of a shock to say the least. They were about to have dinner with a dozen witches and wizards, all of whom were allowed to perform spells regardless of age inside the Granger Summer School of Magic.

Dan and Harry answered the door to greet his relatives and it was Harry who got the shock, his uncle called him Harry and ruffled his hair with his big meaty hand as he walked past with Dan toward the lounge. With his aunt and cousin smiling at him, Harry just needed the music playing to confirm he was in the twilight zone. Instead he got a pull on his trouser leg and looked down to see a worried Dobby.

The little guy whispered urgently. "Harry Potter sir, that man is not the same uncle I met last year."

Harry had his wand in his hand and moved swiftly after them, only to find his uncle getting ready to leave.

"You sir, lured me here under false pretences. I refuse to stay and participate in this magical menagerie any longer, and my nephew will be coming home with me."

Harry had his wand held out of sight behind his leg as he spoke, "But uncle, I hate going to Aunt Thelma's, you know her cats affect my allergies!"

"We'll buy you something for that, get your stuff..."

Harry's wand was up and a disarming hex hit his uncle with even more force than the dummy earlier, Vernon flew across the room and smashed into the wall. Thankfully this old house was made of brick!

It was when the other wand flew into Harry's hand that caused Ron and Hermione to also react swiftly. An incarcero and stupefy soon followed the expelliarmus in hitting the rather large target.

Vernon Dursley was out cold and wrapped up like a parcel, causing Amelia Bones to jokingly ask, "And just why do these three need extra defence lessons?"

She was interrupted by Minerva, "I think there is a more important question we need answered, why does Harry have Albus Dumbledore's wand in his hand?"

"Polyjuice?"

"We'll know within the hour Harry." Hermione answered.

"And just how do you know about polyjuice potion?" McGonagall enquired in that demanding tone of voice only she could manage.

Harry's answer stunned the adult witches and wizard into silence, "Hermione brewed that potion before Christmas so we could get inside the Slytherin common room."

Everyone was looking toward Hermione who got all defensive, "What? We knew Harry wasn't the heir of Slytherin and it's not like anyone else was doing anything about the situation."

Remus couldn't hold his laughter as Augusta commented to Amelia, "You should have brought a bigger pensieve!"

Creepily, neither Petunia nor Dudley had said a word, they just stood there in silence with that same stupid grin plastered on their faces.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 10

Emma Granger wanted to be absolutely sure she understood what was happening in her home, her language though broadcasting her anger at the situation. "Are you trying to tell me that this large pile of shit lying there is actually being impersonated by an even bigger piece of shit?"

The question may have been thrown to the room in general but it was Harry who answered her. "Dobby warned me he might be an imposter. Vernon's sister is called Marge and she hates cats, breeds bulldogs. The chances of Vernon Dursley carrying a wand are non-existent, that is not my uncle."

Dan understood so far but had another few questions, "If that's not Dursley then where is he and why are those two standing there grinning like gormless idiots?"

Minerva had just seen how far Albus would go to keep Harry at Hogwarts and it made her feel sick. "I think it's fortuitous in more ways than one that you have the head of the DMLE as a dinner guest, she'll be able to find the answers to those questions." Amelia was already scanning the two standing Dursleys, attempting to discover what was wrong with them. "The look on Dursley's face when he saw us all sitting here was genuine terror, Albus was sure he was coming here tonight to deal with two muggle parents and a couple of children with only two years magical training behind them. Dumbledore must have thought he couldn't fail to have attempted such a gamble, he always did suffer from overconfidence."

No one there disagreed with Minerva's assessment as Harry handed Amelia the wand he'd won from the disarmed Dursley imposter. She cast the prior incantato spell which confirmed her scans of the two muggles. "It would appear your aunt and cousin have been hit with confundus and cheering charms."

Harry was trying not to laugh but couldn't help himself as the giggles took hold. "It's no wonder they both look as if they're high on something, they've never been cheerful before. This will be a whole new experience for them. Where the hell is Colin Creevey and his bloody camera when you need him?"

Hermione's laughter set the rest of the kids off, they were all well aware that the creepy boy had stalked Harry all last year.

Amelia was also smiling but hers had a predatory quality about it. "A simple finite should return them back to normal but we'll leave them as they are for now. We need some reinforcements and it wouldn't hurt to have more witnesses for when that polyjuice wears off." A tiny silver horse came out the tip of her wand and Amelia gave it some instructions before the creature shot through the wall quicker than the eye could follow.

Harry wasn't the only one who was impressed with this but he was the most vocal. "Madam Bones, I don't know what that was but it looked wicked! Professor Lupin, you have got to teach us that spell."

Remus was about to point out that it would be too advanced for Harry until he considered what he'd seen earlier today. "Harry, yours would probably be about the size of a bus and run people over."

This had quite a few of them chuckling now, the fact that his aunt and cousin joined in had Harry almost on the floor with laughter.

A barrage of pops alerted the house that they had more company. "I'm sorry to ruin your dinner party Mr and Mrs Granger but this is now a criminal investigation. I need to bring in more aurors to act as witnesses and handle any repercussions."

Dan glanced over to the obese man, lying almost forgotten in the corner before answering. "Madam Bones, think nothing of it. Our normal dinner parties will now seem tame in comparison."

Emma squeezed his hand in support, Dan had been so good today and was certainly going to get lucky tonight.

Five aurors and a mediwitch entered the room, her training meant the mediwitch headed straight for the unconscious casualty but Amelia stopped her.

"Leave him for now and attend to the other two first."

Amelia's diagnosis proved correct, a simple finite and both were back to normal. Well if you could call Dudley jumping about with

both hands covering his buttocks and Petunia screaming about freaks at the top of her lungs normal that is.

Amelia soon showed Petunia who was in charge here though, the authority she wielded dripped from every syllable spoken. "Mrs Dursley, I need you to sit down and tell us what you remember. We need to find your husband."

Petunia may have shut up but she didn't need words to get her meaning across as she glanced at the figure of Vernon lying in the corner. She clearly thought they were all nuts!

"Mrs Dursley, that is not your husband but an imposter. We need to discover what happened so we can rescue the real Vernon Dursley."

This concentrated Petunia's mind like nothing else and one name sprang out at her. "Dumbledore! He came to see us, tried to convince us to take the boy back. Said it was imperative he stayed at Hogwarts. Vernon told him to piss off and stick to running his school for freaks. He then told us the boy was rich, this had Vernon very interested until I remembered it would be in the freak bank and the goblins would likely chop our heads off before they would let us touch it. Vernon practically threw him out after that." Even though they were the victims here, the Dursleys weren't endearing themselves to much sympathy. The disgust at being in this company was clearly displayed in her expression and body language. "Dumbledore just appeared and started casting spells on us as we got out the car, he took my Vernon's clothes before locking him in the boot." Petunia was about to race out the room with the intention of setting her husband free when she was prevented from leaving and two aurors went to search the car. Dudley was still standing though had managed to get his back against a wall, a position he wasn't going to give up just to sit down.

A groggy Vernon was soon led into the room and helped into the chair next to his wife, the instant his eyes caught Harry Vernon's temper snapped. "Boy, this is all your fault and the final bloody straw. We never wanted you but weren't given any choice in the matter, you just attached yourself to our family like a bad smell. Well it's time to fumigate boy, you and your freaky ways have affected us for the last time. I don't give a shit what happens to you next, just know you will never cross my door again. Frankly, it would have been better for everyone if you'd died along with your freak parents!"

There was a queue of people there who were ready to dismember Vernon Dursley for those comments. Harry had both arms around Hermione in an attempt to keep her from drawing her wand, Dan was pretty much having to do the same with her mother who was reaching for anything to hit the abusive bastard with. Amelia's sickly sweet patronising voice held them all in check, knowing this woman could cut the fat lump into tiny pieces had them wondering what she was up to. "Mr Dursley, if you no longer wish to be responsible for your nephew then perhaps I can help you with that. I just happen to have the appropriate papers here that will release you from this burden. Sign here and you need never see him again."

Vernon was wary of being tricked but the prize on offer was just too tempting, he and Petunia couldn't wait to sign them.

"Now if you'll excuse us, I shall take my family home." Vernon marched out of there in his underwear and socks, Petunia hanging onto his arm. Dudley edged his way along the wall before sprinting for the door and freedom from this curly tailed nightmare. He would need to lie down and eat a few takeaways to recover from the unaccustomed exercise he'd just performed.

His uncle's triad was water of a duck's back for Harry, he'd been listening to it for as long as he could remember. The actions that followed though had made him angry and he didn't care who knew it. "Madam Bones, what was that all about? You just happened to have the correct paperwork on you? I have had enough of Dumbledore trying to run my life, I don't need or appreciate anyone else applying for the position. Don't you think my opinion should have been asked before pulling that stunt you clearly had planned? If this is an attempt to get me under ministry control then I can tell you now it's not going to happen."

Hermione was now having to return the favour and try to calm Harry, at least when she was angry everything that wasn't screwed down didn't vibrate with the magic pouring out of her.

Amelia realised she'd made a grave mistake, alienating Harry Potter was the last thing she needed or could afford to do. "Mr Potter I can only apologise, I didn't think there was a decision to be made when it came to getting you away from those Neanderthals. The real decision, and one you should most definitely have the biggest input

into, is who you wish to now be your guardians." She could see this placated Harry slightly so Amelia continued. "We hardly know each other but I for one am willing to throw my hat into the ring and offer myself as a candidate to be your guardian. Madam Longbottom feels the same way and I'm sure you'll be considering the Weasleys, having already stayed there last summer."

While Hermione was delighted Harry would never again have to return to the Dursleys, the rest was not good news as far as Harry Potter's girlfriend was concerned. When she heard her father speak, all was forgiven and Hermione remembered why she loved her dad so much.

"Harry, you have been invited to spend the summer with us and, as far as we're concerned, nothing has changed. Should you wish to make that a more permanent arrangement then we can sit down and discuss that to. Just the four of us!"

Amelia had no problems with that solution but could see others strenuously objecting. "Harry, as I've said, I believe this should be as much as possible your decision to make. What concerns me is what happens should the ministry become involved. You've a good idea how Fudge works, handling your case personally would get him a lot of publicity, I dread to think where you could be placed. Once Fudge gets involved, what you want will go out the window."

Harry knew at once she was correct and not trying to railroad him into making any particular decision, it would appear she really did have his best interests at heart. "Thank you for your honesty Madam Bones and sorry about earlier. I will need to give this some serious thought."

Amelia handed Harry the paperwork that his new guardian would need to complete while Hermione was now glaring at him, she obviously wanted Harry to choose the Granger option and was upset that he didn't do so immediately. Harry though needed to consider the implications of what happened here tonight.

Any further discussion was put on hold as the polyjuice began to wear off and their suspicions were proven correct. Albus Dumbledore quite often looked ridiculous in the colourful robes he insisted on wearing, a muggle suit twelve sizes too large for him was

a new low though. The ropes that were wrapped around him didn't help either.

Amelia had him rebound and stunned again for good measure before allowing him to be portkeyed away to a secure location. The head of the DMLE once more apologised to the hosts, "Sorry but I really must leave to deal with this matter, I want a confession out of Dumbledore before Fudge knows what's happening."

Dan understood though lost a little bit of the headway he'd regained earlier with his daughter. "I understand, Susan and Hannah are welcome to stay with us though. Dobby could take them home later or they could spend the night, we have plenty of room."

This was a very generous offer that Amelia graciously accepted, she was going to be very busy tonight. "I'll call tomorrow and collect the girls, it will also give Harry time to consider his decision. Once Fudge discovers just what Dumbledore was up to, the ministry will swing into action. By all means consider the decision carefully but please don't take too long."

Amelia left and those remaining sat down to a late dinner. There was a lot of chatter around the table which annoyed the straitlaced Augusta Longbottom but not as much as the visible tension between Harry and Hermione. The Longbottom matriarch had seen how friendly both were with her Neville so tried to alleviate the situation.

"Harry, I'm very impressed that you have apparently understood the full implications of this matter and are not rushing headlong into a solution that could result in people being hurt. I promise to help you in any way I can."

Emma had of course noticed the tension when Harry hadn't immediately said he wanted to stay here, she wasn't sure what Augusta was offering though and said so. "Madam Longbottom, being non-magical it would appear that I don't understand all the implications here. Perhaps you could explain what you are implying?"

"Emma, I will always call it as I see it. Harry just witnessed his non-magical guardians being illegally manipulated in an attempt to gain control of him. He clearly wants to stay here but is worried the same thing could happen again."

Harry had his head down as he spoke, "Without Dobby and all you here for dinner, Dumbledore would have gotten his way and we wouldn't remember anything about it. We've recently seen the obliviate spell in action. I trust Fudge about as far as I could throw Hagrid and wouldn't put it past him to pull something similar. I don't want anybody else getting hurt because of me."

Augusta was pleased she'd read the situation correctly. "I was sure Harry was sitting there trying to think of someone the ministry can't intimidate or control but who would still let him spend his summer here. I am offering myself to be that person."

Emma wasn't sure if the look of relief that spread over Harry's face was due to Augusta's offer or Hermione's hand slipping into his, giving an unspoken apology. Augusta continued with her offer, "I would like him to spend some time at our home and, of course Hermione is welcome too. That offer is still open whether you accept my guardianship or not."

Neville was beaming at his gran for that, summer was a lonely time for him and these two were amongst his best friends.

Harry lifted his head to speak to Augusta, "Madam Longbottom, thank you for stating that so clearly and your very generous offer. You helped me clear my own mind and a name popped in there. If it doesn't work out then I would be delighted to accept your offer. Mr and Mrs Granger, I hope you now understand why I didn't jump at your offer. The thought of someone casting spells on you because of me, well I can't let that happen. I really do want to stay here as long as you'll let me."

No one missed that Harry ended up talking exclusively to Hermione as he held her hand.

Dan wasn't that out of touch with teenagers to know why his daughter would have hated Harry staying in the same house as Susan Bones. He was also impressed Harry was thinking of them rather than just jumping at the chance to stay with his girlfriend. "Harry, Dan and Emma works fine. I've a feeling we'll be seeing a lot of each other."

Ginny was gutted, she knew that, but for her mother's behaviour, the Burrow would have been ahead of both the Longbottom and Bones as a place Harry wanted to stay. She could see Ron felt the same though neither blamed Harry for that. There was only one person responsible and that was Molly Weasley. Ginny had an idea and would need to speak to her dad about it at the earliest opportunity.

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Hermione lay in bed that night and swore she could still feel her boyfriend's lips on hers. She wasn't sure whether it was the thought of Susan and Hannah staying here or them narrowly avoiding their first fight as a couple but Hermione had almost attacked Harry when kissing him goodnight. The young brunette witch also had to concede that she was wrong in her assumption earlier and Hermione Granger wasn't used to being wrong. She considered the changes in Harry since his last stint in the Hogwarts infirmary and his new sense of maturity she so loved. A large part of that change was undoubtedly due to that parasite no longer being in his head but she would like to think getting all his secrets off his chest helped too.

Hermione conceded she would have to stop jumping to conclusions and learn to speak with Harry first. They may still argue but it would be over something they disagreed about, not fight over a misunderstanding. Harry wouldn't tell her who he was considering as his guardian until he could speak with them and she had to accept that. Knowing that he wanted to stay with her was all she needed to know for now.

Hermione would also need to start thinking about how she was going to repay the Dursleys for their treatment of Harry, only her boyfriend had stopped her extracting the first instalment of that payment earlier. Hearing Harry talk about it was bad enough, that live display tonight had made her blood boil. Hermione would be having a quiet word with her parents about the situation tomorrow, her mum had appeared almost as mad at the Dursleys as she was.

Hermione tried not to think about the mother - daughter talk that had quickly become focused on what was considered 'proper behaviour' for having her boyfriend stay with them. She had to admit the ground rules her mother laid down weren't too strict and placed a modicum of trust on the young couple. They were allowed to kiss goodnight provided the room door was left open, Hermione could live with that.

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Luna was also lying in bed, hugging herself from joy while reflecting back on what happened today. She just couldn't stop smiling. Today was a stellar day for Luna, she not only felt wanted but thoroughly enjoyed the experiences of being included and having friends. Harry Potter became the first boy ever to put his arms around her, even if it was only to help with her spell casting, Luna had enjoyed the experience. She had caught Ron looking in their direction on more than one occasion and Luna had felt guilty for enjoying the contact with Harry even more after that.

The little blond was under no illusions, Harry was clearly with Hermione and was only interested in her as a friend. Luna so badly wanted to be their friend that she would never jeopardise that for anything. It was the hint of jealousy in Ron's eyes as he watched her with Harry that had her excited, any emotional response she could get from Ron would do for now. Luna knew that having friends had instantly put her in a better place than she'd been for a while, a boyfriend would come along in time.

They were all meeting up again in a couple of days and she could hardly wait. She hugged herself tighter with the thought that having friends was wonderful.

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Hannah was sharing a room with her best friend and needed to ask a question, Susan had a massive crush on Harry Potter that now looked a hopeless cause. Her friend had been so excited by the idea of these lessons as an opportunity to get to know Harry better, oh boy had they achieved that! Those pensieve memories were mind blowing.

"Are you ok Suz? You want to talk about it?"

Susan had known this question was coming and had plenty of time to consider her answer. "Yes Hannah, I think I'm ok. Those memories today opened my eyes, the boy I thought I fancied doesn't exist. The Harry Potter we saw today is way better than any boy-who-lived fantasies I may have had but I don't think I could ever

keep up with him." Susan continued her explanation before Hannah had time to interrupt.

"We were both at that Quidditch match when his broom tried to throw him off. The difference being that, while I clung to you in terror, Hermione had worked out what was happening and then did something about it. Could you have walked away and left Harry to face you-know-who? I know I couldn't, I would have done everything I could to drag Harry out of there and we would probably have a dark lord ruling over us by now."

Both girls shivered at that thought. "Last year we both doubted Harry could be the heir of Slytherin, Hermione was brewing polyjuice potion to try and discover who actually was setting that monster on us. What settled it for me was watching her hold him as Harry battled for his life in the infirmary. It was Hermione Granger that helped him defeat you-know-who again, not Dumbledore, McGonagall or Pomfrey. It just emphasised no other girl would even come close where Harry's concerned. How are you supposed to measure up against that? Did you see the way she and Ron sprang into action tonight? The three of them took down Dumbledore for Merlin's sake!"

Hannah could tell that her friend was hurting, brave face or not. She thought for a moment and then decided to break the awkward silence and hopefully lighten the mood a bit. "OK, would you rather have Ron or Neville? Since you're my best friend I'll let you have first pick."

Susan tried not to laugh but couldn't help it, soon both girls were biting their pillows in an attempt to stop the giggles and not disturb the rest of the house.

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Dan Granger was glad their room was in a different part of the house from the kids. The smile was still on his face from last night while he lay with his naked wife snuggling into his side. Yesterday may have been one hell of a day but last night had been spectacular. Dan was currently in two minds, a part of him wanted to get up and treat this wonderful woman to breakfast in bed. Another part of him though wanted to stay right here beside Emma forever.

His dilemma was solved by the appearance of a tray loaded with his wife's favourite breakfast foods, there was even a small vase containing a single red rose. He would have to speak to Harry about how he could reward Dobby for this, the little guy was worth his weight in gold. This opinion was reinforced when Emma woke, spotted the breakfast and then pulled Dan back down to reward him further. Twenty minutes later they discovered their tray had charms on it that kept the food in perfect condition, the Grangers could quickly get used to having a house elf.

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Amelia was discovering that it wasn't just last night that she was going to be busy, today was rapidly turning frantic too. She supposed that arresting Albus Dumbledore would do that for you. The confession they had won from Dumbledore should see him finished at Hogwarts and the Wizengamot. He'd used spells illegally on three muggles and impersonated one of them with the sole intention of kidnapping a young boy.

Albus bloody Dumbledore could dress the facts up any way he wanted but that's what happened. That he was also not only willing but prepared to cast spells on all three Grangers and Harry Potter was also confirmed. Amelia would have loved to question the old wizard a lot more but his ability to resist the effects of veritaserum was nothing short of amazing. It took them administering the maximum safe dose permitted in any twenty-four hours just to get what they did out of him. It wouldn't be long before Fudge was breathing down her neck and watching every move she made so Amelia needed to get this done before that happened.

Shack was her most trusted auror and she was forced to include his young partner otherwise Amelia might have aroused suspicion. Shack had a very high opinion of the pink haired witch, she was about to get a chance to earn it.

"Right, I have called you two here for an assignment that is so secret, it doesn't exist. No paperwork will be produced anywhere in the ministry and it can't be spoken of outside the three people currently in this room. Even if we get another head of the DVLE appointed, it still stays between us. I can't stress how important that is."

This made the two aurors really sit up and take notice so Amelia began telling them everything she knew about horcruxes and what she'd seen from Harry's memories.

"If any of Voldemort's sympathisers discover these things exist, we could soon find ourselves facing a reborn dark lord. I want you to chase down any leads you can find but it must be done quietly, I will always be available to help but trust no one else with this."

To help the two aurors see what they were up against, Amelia showed them Harry's memory of fighting Quirrell and his battle against the horcrux in the Hogwarts infirmary with Dumbledore's plots being exposed. Both aurors had seen the picture of Harry defeating the basilisk and had no trouble believing the lad also destroyed a horcrux at the same time. Both had also been part of the group that raided Malfoy Manor and arrested Lucius. To discover his intentions were not only to kill and maim children but return you-know-who to power made the fact that he was once again a free man all the more galling.

Shack was anything but stupid and asked all the right questions, "Do we know the details of this prophecy or how many horcruxes were made? Young Mr Potter might have finished him for good in the Hogwarts infirmary."

Amelia though could only provide partial answers. "The prophecy in question apparently said only Mr Potter could banish Voldemort. Harry seems to think this is utter tripe and that the prophecy has been fulfilled at least three times. Having watched his memories, I'm inclined to agree with him. We have no way of determining how many Voldemort made which is where you two come in. I want you to go back to the beginning and discover everything you can about one Tom Marvolo Riddle, he later changed his name to lord Voldemort. He was a Slytherin who became head boy at Hogwarts around fifty years ago. My advice would be to start asking questions in the castle and see where the investigation leads you."

This was the part where Amelia knew she might struggle to convince them. "There are things happening that might see me leaving the ministry, I'm asking you both to continue with this investigation and still keep it between us three."

Shack understood how dangerous that situation could become. If it later became known, at the very least it would cost his career. He looked toward his partner for her opinion.

Tonks had joined the aurors to make a difference. She had two members of her family currently residing in Azkaban with another only escaping due to her husband being able to bribe the right people. Add to that Regulus killed while a death eater and the young auror felt she had a lot to prove. Here was the perfect opportunity to start redressing the balance and she didn't hesitate. "I'm in!"

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Ginny didn't think she was going to get a better opportunity than this, the Weasley breakfast table was currently in an uproar. Her mother was loudly berating Ron for having the audacity to fire a curse at Dumbledore while the twins appeared ready to hoist him onto their shoulders and carry him for a victory procession around the garden. In the middle of the madness she whispered to her father. "Dad, can I talk to you for a minute."

Arthur smiled in acknowledgement before leading his daughter into their living room. He was proud of all his children but his youngest two seemed to have blossomed recently and were in danger of eclipsing the rest of his sons. Something was clearly worrying Ginny, though after her recent adventures Arthur would have been surprised if there wasn't. He was determined to do his best to help. They sat next to each other on the couch as Ginny held her father's hand and told him what she wanted.

"Dad, Harry's given me all this money and I want to share some of it with the rest of you. If you can get the time off work, I'd like to pay for us all to take a holiday. I want to go to Egypt and visit Bill."

Arthur thought his heart would burst with pride. After all she'd been through, his little girl was still thinking of them. "Princess, that's an amazingly thoughtful idea but I couldn't let you spend all your money like that."

Ginny couldn't look her father in the eye as she said the next bit. "Harry actually gave us a figure of how much the goblins estimated we would get, Ron and me just couldn't believe it which is why we

decided to keep quiet and wait and see. They reckon we'll receive a million galleons, each! I think I can afford this daddy."

Arthur was drawn from his stupor by the voice of his youngest son. Apparently their conversation wasn't as private as they thought and they had an audience. The rest of their family was standing by the door, all clearly astonished by the amount of gold Ginny had just mentioned.

"That's a bloody brilliant idea Ginny, I'll pay for us all to spend Christmas with Charlie. Us guys missed Romania the last time."

The twins looked as if they'd been hit with a silencing charm, their mouths were moving but no sound was coming out. Percy managed to find his voice eventually, "She did say a million, didn't she?"

It was a grinning Ron who answered him, "Each!"

Molly felt almost sick with worry, this was a lot worse than she thought. With that amount of gold in her vault, even people like the Malfoys would quickly become interested in her little girl. Molly was going to have to do something soon.

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Anything Harry or Hermione asked for was always going to be granted by her grinning parents this morning so a trip to London was never going to be a problem. Hannah and Susan were wearing a change of clothes provided by Hermione and were delighted with the muggle apparel. They were even more pleased when Emma said she would take both girls shopping in muggle London while the other three went to Gringotts. Hedwig flew away carrying a note to Amelia Bones, explaining that the girls would be shopping and probably not back until dinner tonight. The Grangers and company left soon after the snowy owl departed.

Dan had originally insisted to Emma that they take a few days from work to keep an eye on this 'Harry character' before trusting him in the house with their daughter. The father's attitude had done a one hundred and eighty degree turn since then but the days off were now coming in handy.

The Gringotts trio were swiftly whisked through the bank to meet with Ragnok, the goblin leader was pleased to see them.

"Good morning, I hear you've been busy since last we met. The same people being responsible for the downfall of Dumbledore should add even more profit to our little venture. With Dumbledore currently indisposed, we now plan on having an extraction team at Hogwarts tomorrow. Your presence there would push the price up further and help keep the press away from the Granger's door."

Harry considered this request. "Only if the four of us could be there and we get the wards erected at the Granger home at the same time."

Dan now understood what wards were and really wanted to stop wizards from being able to appear in his home, he hated feeling defenceless so quickly agreed with Harry. As far as Dan was concerned, the sooner the wards went up the better he liked it.

Ragnok would arrange it, he would also arrange a portkey to Hogwarts. It was also in the school's best interest to get the best price for the basilisk carcass since they were being gifted twenty percent of it.

Harry then broached the real reason he had wanted to visit. "Ragnok, Dumbledore was trying to get control of my life when he placed spells on my guardians. They have now severed all ties with me and I find myself having to find one before the ministry become involved. My problem is that I may be placing someone in danger by putting them in that position. As Gringotts already control all my finances, could it become my guardian as well? It would only be a legal manoeuvre to keep the ministry off my back as I hope to stay with the Grangers when not attending school."

Ragnok hated to disappoint this young wizard but was forced to explain why that could not happen. "Harry, we goblins do things differently from wizards. In our society you become an adult when your actions and deeds indicate you are ready for that honour. Fighting a giant basilisk to save your friend's life is more than enough for you to be considered an adult in our eyes, therefore we could not be your guardian."

Harry was resigning himself to becoming a Longbottom ward when Ragnok spoke again. "Centuries ago, magic worked the same way before the ministry was formed and everything had to be 'standardised'. They were the ones who decided you went to sleep one night as a boy and awoke next day as a man, irrespective of anything other than age."

None of the trio had an idea where the goblin was going with this and their expressions clearly said so. "Family magic is one of the oldest forms known and the Potters are one of the oldest magical families. What I'm suggesting is that you try to wear the Potter family ring. If the magic accepts you then you are the head of the Potter family, and must be treated as such by everyone. You will be considered an adult in the magical world and won't require a guardian."

Dan couldn't fail to see the longing in the young boy's expression but he had to ask the hard question. "Ragnok, what happens if the magic doesn't accept Harry?"

"Nothing, Harry is the last of the Potters and the ring is rightfully his. It would only delay the inevitable."

Harry could see no downside to this, try on a ring and all his problems might be solved. He quickly agreed, what was not to like?

The ring was sent for and Harry loved it from his first glance at the beautiful gold griffin that was carved around the gold band, its ruby eyes were particularly striking. Harry didn't think this was going to work since he could practically fit two fingers into the House Potter ring. The instant it was placed on the proper finger though, a red glow enveloped his hand as the ring shrank to a perfect fit.

Ragnok stood and gave a slight bow, Harry quickly mirrored the goblin's actions. "Congratulations Lord Potter. In taking control of your family, you need never worry about anyone trying to force guardianship on you again. That ring signifies you are the head of an ancient and noble family, a symbol of your status that is universally acknowledged anywhere magic exists."

Hermione was now standing beside Harry, proudly clutching his arm while her dad remained seated. Dan Granger didn't think he could stand if he wanted to at the moment. His Hermione's little ragamuffin

best friend was filthy rich, thought the world of his daughter and was now a lord to boot! He felt like there was some gigantic cosmic fruit machine at play here and Hermione's spin had just come up jackpot, jackpot, jackpot!

The trio were then 'privileged' to see a goblin's sense of humour in action as Ragnok asked in all seriousness. "Lord Potter, how would you like me to handle the twenty seven betrothal contracts currently on file pending the next head of the Potter family being confirmed?"

Harry needed his seeker reflexes as Hermione's knees appeared to give out at that news. He held his girlfriend close and his expression deadpanned as he replied. "Ragnok, unless there is one in the name of Granger, please inform the parties involved that I'm afraid I must disappoint them."

Ragnok roared with laughter as the young lord verbally acquitted himself well, the couple were still blushing furiously though. Harry asked if the fact that he was now Lord Potter could be kept quiet, he wanted to see how the ministry would act on the guardianship issue before shooting them down. Ragnok thought this was a wonderful idea and swore Harry must have some goblin ancestor hidden deep in his past.

Dan was sitting wondering where he could get his hands on a betrothal contract and if it needed Emma's signature? He decided he could ruin all the gains he'd made with the two most important women in his life if he mentioned this so had to accept discretion should be the better part of valour for now. They were unfortunately now facing a visit to the Weasleys though, Dan would not be letting the kids out of his sight this time.

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Albus was sitting in his cell contemplating his life, there really wasn't much else for him to do. He'd managed to protect most of his secrets under truth serum but that blasted Amelia had gotten enough information to see him definitely kicked out of Hogwarts and probably the Wizengamot as well. With Fawkes refusing to answer his call, contemplation was all he had left.

Albus couldn't believe how stupid he'd been, he'd arrived almost half an hour before the Dursleys and had plenty of time to check the

house, he just didn't think he needed to. The rest must have arrived earlier and he certainly couldn't believe the coven of witches that awaited him as he entered the room. Even then he could probably bluffed his way back out if it wasn't for that blasted Potter. Not only did he knock Albus Dumbledore on his arse, the boy is now the master of the elder wand. Not that Albus planned on telling him anytime soon – or ever!

He was the only one who understood Harry had to be protected from himself, if the ministry ever got involved in his care then Albus didn't hold out too much hope for Harry being around to receive any Christmas presents. The death eaters would be falling over themselves to gain custody of the boy-who-lived, what better way to ensure their safety when their master eventually returned than being able to deliver the one thing Voldemort wanted on a proverbial plate! He didn't think their world would survive either if someone like Malfoy were to be appointed guardian of Harry Potter. If only people would stop interfering with his plans, when would they realise that everything he did was for the greater good?

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As it turned out, Dan didn't have to worry about the Weasley woman trying to interfere with Hermione and Harry's fledgling relationship, she was too busy screaming at her daughter that she was never being allowed to go anywhere near that chamber again to bother with the young couple. The fact that the beast was already dead and there would be goblins, professors and probably a whole host of media there as well did nothing to placate the worried witch. Her mind was made up and it would probably be easier to move a few mountains than change Molly's rock solid opinion.

Dan thought Arthur was harmless and actually found his naivety about the world amusing, that the wizard also thought the same of Dan and magic meant the two could chat for ages without actually saying anything meaningful. His wife though was a whole different kind of animal. Molly Weasley was without doubt one of the most overbearing and opinionated woman Dan ever had the misfortune to meet.

He most certainly considered Emma to be a formidable woman but Molly laboured under the impression that if you shouted something loud enough and often enough then, not only would you be right but

everyone else would be convinced of that too. All she achieved was to give everyone in the vicinity a pounding headache.

Thankfully they were able to make this a quick visit, Ginny had ran to her room in tears while Ron was leading them down the garden path and outside the Burrow wards. The boy was busy again apologising for his mother's behaviour and assuring his friends he would be there. There was no way Dan could miss the image of Molly standing back there, hands on hips and scowling fiercely at the sight of Hermione holding Harry's arm as they walked away from the Burrow.

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Voldemort's scowl wasn't quite in the Molly Weasley class but he was even more upset at the sight of the odd couple strolling down to the village. Frank and Sibyll were not listening to their horcruxes anymore and had made the decision to go for groceries against all that they said. Without the possibility of another magic user being possessed by a horcrux, Tom and Riddle were discovering they had even less control than they thought.

The spirit of Voldemort was almost incandescent with rage, he was the most feared dark lord in history. People were so terrified of him they were afraid to say his name, even after they thought he was dead. There were three versions of him now living in this house yet they were being bossed around by an ancient muggle and a sherry-drinking squib!

He was spending every possible minute trying to solve the puzzle of how this became possible but so far had drawn a blank. Nothing in all his years of studying had prepared the dark lord for a situation like this.

Arm in arm they headed for the village and would no doubt set tongues a wagging, they didn't appear to care. Having something nice for dinner had become more important to them than keeping Sibyll's presence here a secret. After watching the couple for a few days Voldemort found himself agreeing with his soul brothers. Being trapped in one of those bodies was infinitely worse than being a disembodied spirit, having to be involved in those night-time activities would have him considering death as a preferable alternative too!

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The picture featuring Harry, Hermione and Ron with the basilisk providing the backdrop graced the front page of the Daily Prophet and again caused emotions to be running high almost everywhere it was read. Nowhere was this truer than a certain cell in the high security wing of Azkaban. On his annual inspection of the depressing but unfortunately necessary facility, Fudge appeared only too willing to give his copy of the paper away. Sirius Black poured over it like a parched man discovering a brewery had just opened on his doorstep.

This was a real shot in the arm to the bedraggled and hope-deprived prisoner. The paper delved into great details about his godson's life and even mentioned that the young muggleborn witch in the picture was now his girlfriend. To Sirius, this was ambrosia for his soul and a balm on his guilty conscience. Failing his godson in his grief stricken pursuit of vengeance was easily the biggest regret of his life. Seeing Harry on that page with his arm around the young witch and his best friend by his side had tears in the marauder's eyes for the first time since that fateful Halloween. It wasn't the deeds Sirius was focusing on but the friends by his side, his time in Azkaban had taught him that those should be the most important things in life.

He was devouring the picture with his eyes for at least the hundredth time that day when he noticed something he'd missed before. The rat which popped his head out the Weasley boy's pocket instantly focused his attention and gave him something he'd been missing for almost twelve years.

The need to protect his godson from the rat unleashed feelings in Sirius that were primeval in origin. In the last decade the prisoner had a hard time justifying his continued existence to himself. With each day the same and the dementors relentless, only Padfoot had allowed him to cling to his sanity. He now had that reason right in front of him, vividly portrayed in black and white. All he had to do was get out of here, he silently swore vengeance on the rat and meant it for the first time in years.

When the guards were later questioned, they reported the phrase that Sirius Black repeated over and over. "He's at Hogwarts!"

A/N Thanks for reading.

Chapter 11

Emma watched her husband's face take on a frown as an owl delivered Hermione's copy of the Daily Prophet, it took all her self-control not to chuckle. She knew exactly what was troubling her husband and couldn't help but find it amusing. Their daughter had featured prominently on the front page of a national newspaper yesterday, pictured with her arm around her heroic boyfriend who just happened to be a lord no less. Daniel Granger's problem was that he couldn't boast to anyone about it and it was killing him! Emma hadn't missed his dropped hints about betrothal contracts either, the only reason she didn't bite his head off was that he could quite genuinely claim he only wanted what was best for their daughter. It would be really hard to dispute that the young man currently sitting next to her daughter wasn't the best for her, Hermione certainly wouldn't raise an argument against it.

Anyone who looked at yesterday's picture could see the youngsters were serious about each other. Emma also noticed the rat in the picture, the thought of that thing anywhere near her home had left the terrified woman needing to sit down. Hermione had reassured Emma that she explained to Ron her mother was terrified of rats and Scabbers had never been near their house.

Hermione's loud gasp drew both parents attention but it was Harry who immediately worried them, they weren't sure if he was going to pass-out or throw-up. Possibly both if his complexion was anything to judge by, the boy looked hellish. In lieu of an explanation, Hermione pushed the paper across the breakfast table toward her parents before enveloping her boyfriend in her arms.

The headline screamed that someone called Sirius Black had escaped from the Wizarding prison, Azkaban. He was apparently a very dark wizard indeed since this feat had never been achieved before. The real kicker though was that he apparently had been best-friends with James Potter before betraying Harry's parents to Voldemort. Emma couldn't believe it, Harry just couldn't seem to catch a break. He no sooner appeared to have one problem sorted when another would come shooting along. Amelia had warned them it would only be a matter of time before the minister became personally involved in Harry's guardianship issues and then what they wanted wouldn't be a consideration. Harry had told no one of his new status and filed the papers so she and Dan could become

his legal guardians in the muggle world. Hermione had been ecstatic! Now they had another problem to deal with.

The kids had a lesson from Remus today and Emma was hoping to hear from Susan if Amelia had been successful in her bid to become the new headmistress of Hogwarts. They had decided not to say anything about it in case it didn't happen, one glance at the kids reinforced her belief they could use some good news.

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Amelia was prepared to hand in her notice next day when she was awakened at three a.m. with the news that Sirius Black had escaped from Azkaban. She was now fretting over her decision, that was until she saw the Prophet. The ministry leaked information like a sieve. This hardened her resolve to leave and assured Amelia she had made the correct decision in only trusting Shack and his young partner with the task she gave them.

Amelia was certain Fudge would use this as a heaven-sent opportunity to become personally and very publicly involved in Harry Potter's life. Even if the lad completed that form this morning, Fudge would now block all attempts to place Harry outwith his control. With Dumbledore being removed as a threat and Potter under his thumb, that would leave Fudge as the only player on the board. Things did not bode well should Voldemort ever manage to return.

Yesterday had gone so much better than she could have hoped too. The board had quickly accepted the goblins' offer of the chance to enter the chamber and gaze upon the basilisk for themselves. At the meeting she had let them view Harry's memory of facing Quirrell / Voldemort in his first year and Dumbledore's goose was cooked. When Augusta had then offered Amelia's name as a possible replacement, the rest of the board had practically pleaded with her to accept. They even gave her total control of the funds generated by the sale of the basilisk carcass, she had their unconditional support for the task of turning Hogwarts into the premier magical school it was supposed to be.

Minerva had been more than slightly shocked to retain her job but delighted to be working under Amelia. The canny Scots witch had eyes that sparkled brighter than Dumbledore's when Amelia gave her first instruction as Headmistress of Hogwarts.

"I want your ideas for how we turn Hogwarts around sent to me ASAP. Be that personnel changes, curriculum alterations or areas where gold really needs to be spent. I intend to make a clean sweep here, anyone not pulling their weight at Hogwarts will not be here for much longer."

Minerva asked if she could consult the other heads of house and got the answer she was hoping for. "Minerva, I don't particularly care where the ideas come from. As long as they're good ones, we can and will use them."

Minerva couldn't help but think Hogwarts was going to be a different school under Amelia Bones from day one.

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Severus had ranted and raved at yesterday's Prophet, the thought of all that gold going to Potter, the mudblood and the Weasleys put him right off his breakfast. He was astonished at the size of the bloody thing and was at least looking forward to basilisk potion ingredients dropping in price, due to the glut in the market a beast that size would undoubtedly cause. Lucius sadly informed him that all the publicity was actually forcing the prices up as the public were desperate to snap it up as souvenirs, souvenirs that would probably be a sound investment as the goblins were issuing certificates of authenticity. His conservative estimate that the beast was worth a few million galleons put Severus off his lunch as well.

His entire life appeared to be following a pattern lately, just when the potions master thinks things can't get any worse, they quickly do! Today's headlines proclaiming that bastard Black had escaped was certainly worse in his book. If there was one person who could possibly usurp James Potter as the person Severus hated most, it was Sirius Black.

Severus had thought it a fitting payback that he'd helped engineer the entire incident that saw one enemy dead and the other in Azkaban. He was the one who noticed Pettigrew's resentment as Potter got married and had a career alongside Black as an auror. Even the werewolf was doing better than little Peter, leaving him ripe for the approach. Lucius was a master of that art, he initiated

Severus into becoming a death eater and currently had the minister wrapped around his purse strings.

Lucius had actually left early this morning to have a quiet word with Fudge, he saw this as an opportunity for some payback of his own. Severus knew just how sneaky and utterly ruthless his new employer could be, that Potter's name was near the top of the pile for those deserving the aforementioned pay-back was the only highlight on his horizon. Severus couldn't really handle anymore bad news at the moment.

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Amelia had no sooner stepped into her office at the ministry when Fudge appeared. She half expected this but not the actions that followed.

"Ah Amelia, I hear you will be leaving us for Hogwarts?"

"Eh yes Cornelius. I realise the timing could hardly be worse with this Black affair but I could stay in post to the middle of August. I can hopefully have the situation resolved before I leave for my new job."

"Oh I don't think that will be necessary. With the way Dumbledore was running things at Hogwarts, I think you should head to Scotland as soon as possible. We can waive your notice as Hogwarts needs are greater than ours. I've never seen the dementors so angry and have already given the order that Black has to be kissed on sight so he won't get far. This will give your replacement the chance to cut their teeth on some real work and gain the respect of the auror corps from the start. After all your years of faithful service to the ministry I feel it is only fair that we don't stand in the way of this fabulous opportunity, you can clear out your office today."

She was being given the bum's rush but was unable to do anything about it.

"I'm sure you will initiate a clear-out at Hogwarts and I think it's high time the ministry did the same. There will have to be some reorganisation at the ministry and this will allow us to start today."

So it was that, less than an hour after entering the building, Amelia found herself in the ministry atrium with her belongings shrunk and

filling her pockets. Not how she imagined her day going and she was certain other hands than Fudge were behind this. If Amelia had known Fudge's next destination after he left her office, she would have known for certain who that person was.

-oOoOo-

Arthur Weasley looked up from his desk in surprise as the minister entered, he wasn't even sure Fudge knew where his office actually was.

"Good morning minister, how may I help you?"

"Weasley, I felt it was my duty to give you this piece of news personally. There has been an ongoing review of ministerial departments and I'm afraid yours didn't fare too well. It is therefore my decision that the misuse of muggle artefacts will become a sub-section of the improper use of magic office. Most of your staff will transfer over there but I'm afraid it already has a departmental head and I wouldn't insult you by offering a lesser position. You can take the rest of the morning to clear your office and we will of course pay you to the end of the month. I would just like to offer a personal thank you for your long and loyal service to the ministry."

Arthur didn't see the minister leave, nor had he any idea how long he sat there just staring in front of him. He was only brought out of his stupor when Perkins arrived and asked him what the minister wanted, it was only then that the reality of the situation struck home.

"Oh, he just sacked me!"

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After reading the Prophet, Remus thought he should head for the Grangers early. Harry was sure to have lots of questions that really needed answering, not something he was looking forward to. This was not the way Remus wanted the lad to discover the truth about his godfather. Remus was still unsure if he should reveal that part though it was bound to come out and probably better if Harry heard it now.

He was soon led into the living room where the boy in question was currently sitting closely beside a very protective girlfriend. Remus

was about to discover just how protective Hermione could be of an upset Harry. The gloves were now off as far as the girl was concerned. Remus had hardly time to sit down before she threw her first question at him.

"Mr Lupin, since you were a friend of Harry's parents, can we assume you also knew Sirius Black?"

"I thought I did Hermione but it appears I was wrong, we were all wrong. Sirius Black was my best friend and like a brother to Harry's father. He ran away from his family when he was sixteen and your grandparents took him in. He was best man at your parents' wedding and godfather to their only child. He was also the man who betrayed your parents to Voldemort and then killed another friend of ours, along with a dozen muggles. He's been rotting in Azkaban for over ten years."

Harry looked toward this man who was becoming a vital link to his parents and asked the question he really needed the answer to. "Why did he do it?"

"Oh that's a question I've been asking myself ever since that Halloween, I still haven't come up with an answer I can live with. Sirius was as close to your father as you are to Ron, they'd been best friends since starting Hogwarts together. I've studied this from every angle and still can't make any sense of it."

Emma interrupted, "What did he say at his trial?"

Remus lowered his head before answering, "I've no idea Emma. In my life I've been able to count close friends on the fingers of one hand, I lost them all at the same time. I was in a bad place for a number of years after that."

Hermione asked the question she'd wanted to ask since first meeting Remus Lupin. "Is that why you couldn't take Harry? He was in a bad place for a lot longer than that!"

Emma was about to reprimand her daughter for going too far when Remus held his hand up to stop the woman. "Hermione is only saying what everyone else was thinking. I would have loved to raise you Harry but wizarding law prohibits me from doing so. I suffer from lycanthropy and therefore the ministry classifies me as a dark

creature. There is no way they would let me take care of a child, especially Harry Potter."

Hermione was trying to remember where she had heard that word. "Lycanthropy? Does that mean you're a werewolf?"

"I'm afraid so. I'll understand if you don't want to continue these lessons now..."

Harry interrupted immediately, "I assume my parents knew this and it made no difference to them? Why would you think it would make a difference to us?"

Remus was saved by the bell, literally! Dan went to answer the door to whoever else had decided to arrive early.

He led Amelia, Susan and Hannah back into the room. "Hi everyone, I had a couple of interesting meetings recently that affects everyone in this room so I thought we would arrive early and discuss them. Last night Dumbledore was officially dismissed from Hogwarts and I found myself being appointed the new headmistress."

This led to quite a few congratulations being offered but Amelia wasn't quite finished with her tale yet. "This morning I didn't even get time to take my cloak off, far less tender my resignation when Fudge appeared and very politely threw me out the building. With Dumbledore's case still pending and now this Black business, he's definitely up to something. I'm sorry to say this Harry but it will probably involve you in some capacity."

Harry was left shaking his head, "No change there then Headmistress Bones, we think we've got it covered but thanks for the warning. Just before you arrived, Hermione asked Professor Lupin a question that he couldn't answer. You might be able to help us with it. Can you tell me the reason Black gave for betraying my parents?"

Amelia would have dearly loved to have an answer for Harry, she was still hopeful of convincing them both to attend Hogwarts come September. "I'm sorry Harry, details of that case are very sparse and none ever came across my desk. I don't have an answer for you."

This had Dan thinking out loud, "Surely there must be a transcript of the man's trial stored somewhere? Harry at least should be able to access that. I totally understand where you're coming from with this son. If it was me, I would need to know as well."

Amelia could also understand but offered a word of caution, "I will have a few people I trust look into the matter but can I suggest Harry stays as far away from the ministry as possible? At least until we discover just what Fudge is up to."

Another ring at the doorbell saw Dan returning with Ron and Ginny, accompanied by their father. Arthur was surprised to see the head of the DMLE there, "Amelia, surely Fudge didn't fire you as well?"

The warning bells were now ringing loudly for Amelia as she began to suspect what was developing at the ministry. "It would appear Fudge is clearing out of the ministry anyone who would offer support to Harry, I think you will have a visit from the ministry before the day is out."

Dobby popped in with Luna and then went to collect Neville. "Since everyone has arrived early, why don't we start early? That will give us all a chance to have a chat after our lesson."

They all agreed with Hermione's suggestion, Ron picked up pretty quickly that she was trying to take Harry's mind off today's paper. They had no sooner made the back garden though when there was an almighty clang that had them racing back inside. Hermione confirmed for her parents what the noise was. "Someone just attempted to apparate directly into our house, they were bounced back by the wards."

Amelia, Arthur and Remus all had their wands drawn, as did all the kids. Their 'visitor' didn't bother ringing the doorbell either but barged straight into the Grangers' home.

"Who gave permission for wards to be placed on a muggle home? Get them taken down at once."

Amelia thought this was about as bad as it could get for Harry, Fudge had sent his hatchet woman. Dolores appeared as if she'd

ended up in a hedge and looked seriously pissed off. She also had four aurors with her.

Harry though had faced down Dumbledore, Voldemort and a sixty-foot basilisk. A wee ugly woman in a hideous pink cardigan didn't frighten him in the slightest, even if she had twigs sticking out her hair. "Who the hell do you think you are to try and apparate into our home, you don't even have the decency to knock!"

"I am Dolores Umbridge, head of the DMLE and I don't have to knock! I'm here to take Harry Potter into protective custody..."

Harry burst out laughing, "Oh that's too funny for words, I suppose it's for my own good too? When you can stand up to Voldemort then you can protect me!" No one missed Dolores and the aurors shuddering as Harry mentioned the dark lord's name. "Go back and tell Fudge I don't need his protection, I won't be dealing with any of his lackeys and I'm not Hagrid. I have no intention of coming quietly. Now you are not wanted here, get out of my home!"

Dolores made to grab Harry but the wards were quicker, she and her aurors found themselves reacquainted with the hedges they had visited earlier. Not only that, the house had vanished from their sight. It was a very angry Dolores who made her way back to the ministry, her first mission as head of the DMLE had been a disaster. Not the way to impress her aurors and Cornelius would be raging.

Back in the house there were a lot of stunned people, Arthur set the ball rolling.

"I can't believe Fudge made that bitch head of the DMLE, what the hell was the man thinking?"

Remus quickly agreed, "I don't know if she was ever a death eater but her views would fit their profile. She is a blood purist of the worst sort and now holds one of the most powerful jobs in Britain, this can't be good."

Amelia was more concerned for what happened here this morning, "Harry, you just made a very bad enemy. She will be back, and back in force. This will also allow the ministry to get the press on their side, claiming you're out of control and need a firm hand. Fudge will hold

the moral high ground to do whatever he wants with your guardian issue, and of course it will all be for your own good."

Arthur was a recent recipient of first-hand knowledge just how Fudge operated and agreed with Amelia. "I'm amazed she didn't just barge her way back in, she had four aurors with her. What are those wards Harry?"

"They have a very special function in that they will hide the house from anyone who wishes to do us harm. They now recognise 'protective custody' as harm so ejected the ministry people immediately. The ministry won't be able to find the house now but our friends will. Madam Bones, can I ask you a question? Does the DMLE have the right to storm into the residence of the head of an ancient and noble family?"

Amelia could see immediately where this was going and felt a great sense of relief, "No Lord Potter, they can't. They would need a warrant signed by the minister and approved by the Wizengamot before that could happen. You would also have to be facing some charges, given the chance to report for questioning voluntarily and refused. That law cannot be changed by the minister just because it suits his purposes, the old families would never stand for that."

Harry's ring now became visible to everyone in the room but Amelia wasn't finished yet. "If you're wearing that ring, you must know that you are about to be buried under offers of a different type of control?"

Harry nodded, "We have been reading everything we could find on pureblood laws and customs and have already taken actions to counter that."

This was news to Hermione and Emma, Dan quickly left the room. "Hermione, you've read the same books as me and know that this gets arranged between the heads of house. Your dad and I discussed this but I wanted to wait until we were a bit older before asking you."

Right on cue, Dan returned and handed Harry what was clearly a ring box. He also handed a legal looking document to Amelia. "Hermione, your dad and I may have completed the legal paperwork

but it was always conditional on you saying yes. Hermione Jane Granger, will you be my betrothed?"

Hermione was trying to be angry with the two most important men in her life, she really was but her heart just wasn't in it. Probably because her heart was currently doing triple somersaults with joy at Harry having asked her. She managed to say yes and hold off long enough for Harry to place a beautiful diamond encrusted platinum ring on her finger before attacking her betrothed to much cheering.

Emma was in much the same position, she so wanted to rant and rave at her husband but their daughter was obviously ecstatic with the agreement. She was pretty happy herself with it, was it customary to throw a betrothal party or did she have to wait until their engagement?

She felt her husband's arms snake around her waist from behind as he whispered in her ear. "You surely don't think I would have signed one of those things for any other boy do you? Hermione clearly wanted this, it also provides our family with protection from that woman this morning and those like her."

Amelia couldn't contain her smile now, she knew how Fudge would play this and Harry had effectively cut him off at the knees. The girls were all around Hermione, admiring her ring while Ron and Neville shook Harry's hand. Amelia just had to ask the question. "Lord Potter, is it your intention to let the ministry publicly make a total arse of itself before you reveal this information?"

Harry was chuckling, "Why Madam Bones, whatever do you mean? Do you honestly think I would let the Prophet be full of the ministry's ranting before telling our side of the story?"

His chuckling abruptly stopped when he was face to face with an angry looking Emma Granger. Emma couldn't hold her fake expression for long though and her face cracked into a wide grin, it was a much-relieved Harry who was drawn into a hug. He didn't get off scot-free, "I'll let you away with it this time but don't be making a habit of going behind my back to arrange things. Wizarding society may be patriarchal but the Granger household is most certainly not, in this family it is a partnership and the ladies of the house certainly have a say."

An excited Hermione then hugged her mother and showed off her ring, "I had a say mum and it was a yes!"

It was Dan who threw the spanner into the works, "Well I think our family needs to sit down quickly and discuss what our next move should be. If that woman is an example of what is now running magical Britain then I think it should be just that, a move out of here."

Emma wasn't disagreeing but was more cautious than her impulsive husband. "We had planned on travelling to France and checking out the magical school there. We should be able to bring our holidays forward and leave this weekend. Dobby will have us all packed in under ten minutes!"

Harry and Hermione looked toward their friends, Ron was first to answer. "We were planning on a trip to Egypt and visiting Bill. With Dad no longer working we were hoping to go as soon as possible. If you come back and say the school is better than Hogwarts, that will be good enough for us."

Luna's face fell at this, "My dad is going trekking in Norway for a month, I was hoping I could stay with Ginny."

Hermione got a quick nod from her mum before answering, "Luna, you could come with us if you want. Harry owns a house in the south of France and we could visit Beauxbatons together."

Luna was quick to brighten up and even quicker to agree.

Susan was next to answer, "Sorry guys. I understand why you need to look around but with my aunt now headmistress, I'll be going to Hogwarts in September."

Neville was in pretty much the same boat, "My gran's on the school board. With Dumbledore gone, I'll be heading back to Hogwarts."

Harry was quick to agree with his friends, "No problem guys and we perfectly understand, Hogwarts should be a much better school with Headmistress Bones in charge. If it weren't for the ministry breathing down my neck, it would probably be top of our list too. We all know they won't back off and now with this Black thing, perhaps it would be better if we left the country."

Amelia still thought Harry Potter leaving would be a disaster for the country and wasn't above applying some gentle pressure to influence their decision. "Arthur, could you come to Hogwarts tomorrow. We have a potions professor sacked, a care of magical creatures professor who's retiring and a ghostly professor who's about to become history himself. I've worked with you for years at the ministry and you are the kind of wizard we need teaching at Hogwarts."

Ginny was giggling at the new headmistress's offer, "Oh I bet the twins will love that!"

It was then that Remus chipped in, "Amelia, you may need a new defence teacher as well. I can't see these people allowing me to teach at Hogwarts, especially Umbridge."

Harry had a thought though, "Professor Lupin, would you like to come to France with us as well? We could continue our lessons over the summer and you could also double as a bodyguard in case Black shows his face. You are easily the best defence professor we've ever had. I will of course mention these facts when the Daily Prophet contacts me about the ministry's claims."

Amelia now had a wide grin on her face, "A defence professor with the personal recommendation of Harry Potter? The ministry would have a hard time shifting you out of a new Hogwarts. This would be doubly so since you also have the complete backing of the new headmistress. I realise there will be a few days a month when you will be unable to take your classes but I am planning on teaching them myself. I don't want to become another Dumbledore, sitting in that office with no idea what's going on in my school." The new headmistress was well aware that the Grangers would choose whatever school they thought was best for Hermione, that didn't mean she wasn't going to make Hogwarts sound as attractive as she could every chance Amelia got.

Remus was in favour of the idea but wanted to sit and talk it out with them later, he suggested getting back to their defence lesson.

As the group entered the back garden Hermione had another question for Remus. "Professor Lupin, these dementors sound horrific. Is there any defence against them?"

"There's a defence called the patronus charm that can shield you and may even drive one away. It's a version of the charm Amelia used to produce that silver messenger horse. It's very difficult though and NEWT level defence."

Harry's jaw had a determined set to it, "Well professor if things run true to form, I'll be up to my armpits in these creatures before long. Could you try and teach us this spell?"

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Shack was impressed once more by his young partner, the information they received in Hogwarts would have seemed like a dead end to him. Tonks, with her muggle background, was able to procure a birth certificate for Tom Marvolo Riddle with both parents names on it. While running down the Gaunt information in the ministry files, the connection soon became obvious. Both the father, Marvolo and son died in Azkaban but it was the son's second time there that sealed the deal for the auror. Morfin Gaunt was sentenced to life after he confessed to the murder of three muggles, all with the surname Riddle. One of whom just happened to be listed on the birth certificate as Voldemort's father. It was time for him and Tonks to pay a little visit to Little Hangleton.

-oOoOo-

Voldemort was starting to panic, the version of him in the old muggle was struggling to assert any form of control but it was the female squib that had the spirit really worried. That version appeared in danger of disappearing altogether and Voldemort hadn't a clue why. The horcruxes were only able to hold a discussion with him because the hosts allowed it. That permission was quickly withdrawn when there was a knock at the front door.

Frank went to answer it while Sibyll made a pot of tea, it was to this scene of domesticity that he led a large coloured gentleman along with a younger girl with pink hair.

"Professor Trelawney? What are you doing here?"

Sibyll stared at the girl for a moment before placing her, "Oh hello dear, fancy seeing you here. If I remember correctly you always

wanted to be an auror. Can I assume you are here in an official capacity?"

Shack now had his wand out, "I am Auror Shacklebolt and this is my partner Tonks. I didn't realise there was anyone magical living here."

"Well, technically you are correct Auror Shacklebolt. Frank here is a muggle and I would be classed as a squib. I was a professor of divination, you don't exactly need a lot of magical power for that post."

Shack was looking at this strange woman with the very thick glasses and the wrinkled old man with a fair degree of suspicion. He couldn't sense any danger here as such but something just didn't feel right. "Can I ask what you are doing here professor and where does Frank fit into this picture?"

"Oh that's easy sir, I live here – with Frank!"

Both aurors were now staring at this odd couple and wondering just what she meant by that last statement, surely not what they were thinking.

Sibyll continued, "Frank has been the caretaker here for many years and I left the castle to be with him. What is the problem that requires two aurors to come knocking on our door? "

Shack was watching this woman as she casually poured four cups of tea, it was time to do some investigating. "Oh, nothing that we shouldn't be able to clear up in a matter of moments. Would you mind if my partner and I did some magical scans inside this building?"

"Yes auror, I would most certainly mind."

Shack was about to say something he would probably regret when he felt his partner's hand on his forearm. Tonks tried to save the current situation escalating into one of conflict, there was a steely look in the old muggles eyes that told her this man wasn't as helpless as Shack was taking him for. "Professor, can I ask why you don't want us to perform these scans? You must know they are totally harmless to you both."

"Oh I know they're harmless to Frank and me, but can you guarantee they won't hurt our child that I'm carrying? I've waited such a long time to have a baby, I don't intend to take the slightest chance with its health."

Frank soon had his arms around Sibyll and was kissing her passionately after hearing that news, completely disregarding the two strangers present.

Shack's senses had been telling him something strange was going on here and he couldn't imagine anything stranger than the sight before him. The woman must be younger than she appeared but the old guy had a face that looked like a cross between a pug and a bloodhound. He was quite simply ancient!

Tonks was also struggling with the concept of geriatric sex. She wondered if Amelia could obliviate her after she reported their findings, for security reasons of course. Her report to Amelia would say this situation was definitely weird but harmless. These two didn't have enough magic between them to cast a lumos.

The girls at Hogwarts used to say some strange things about Trelawney but never even got close to this situation. Tonks was forced to admit though, her old professor was looking healthier and happier than she'd ever seen her. Swapping sherry for sex appeared to be agreeing with her. Trelawney with a baby, it would have taken a brilliant seer to predict that one!

A/N Thanks for reading

My next post will be chapter 2 of 'A Different Halloween'

Chapter 12

The Severus Snape who sat down to breakfast that morning would have had his former students running away in horror, the man was actually jovial! The cause of this drastic change in attitude, and appetite, was not difficult to discern, his repeated glances at the headlines in the Prophet easily explained it.

Out of control Potter attacks new head of DMLE

The headline alone was almost enough to crack his face into a smile, the article that followed was every bit as delicious as his breakfast to the former head of Slytherin. It described in graphic detail how Potter had erected illegal wards at a muggle home and the travesty that followed. The new head of the DMLE, Dolores Umbridge, had bravely fought her way past those illegal wards, only to be thrown out of the house by Harry Potter using an as yet unidentified form of dark magic. His guilt has been confirmed since he had gone into hiding and there is now a warrant issued for his arrest by the minister himself.

Severus was glad he was on the same side as Lucius as his new employer's wrath was mighty and swift, Weasley and Potter would surely testify to that.

Draco was also reading the article again for about the fifth time, he was even more in awe of his father now. In one fell swoop he'd taken out the Weasleys, Potter and Granger. It was fair to say there were rather smug expressions being worn at the Malfoy breakfast table.

If they had been aware of the meeting currently taking place inside Gringotts then they definitely wouldn't have been so chirpy.

-oOoOo-

The reporter and photographer from the Prophet were led into a meeting room inside Gringotts which contained Harry Potter and the three Grangers, that it also contained Ragnok and six heavily armed goblin guards insured that the Prophet personnel were going to be on their best behaviour. The photographer was waiting until he got some sense toward the tone of the meeting before taking any photographs, his reporter colleague had no such qualms. His bum had

hardly touched the offered seat before the first question was on its way.

"Harry, I assume you've read today's prophet? Can I ask for your comments on it?"

Harry also wanted to get straight to the point and didn't hold back, he'd talked the whole thing over for hours with Remus and the Grangers and was well prepared. "It's all a pack of lies aimed at discrediting me. The entire thing is nothing more than Minister Fudge's latest attempt at using my name to buy him some much-needed popularity. This time he went too far!"

Both reporter and photographer perked-up considerably at this. They expected some half-arsed excuses, not an attack on the minister by the boy-who-lived. This was going to be explosive. "Are you saying you didn't erect those wards or throw Umbridge out of the house?"

"No! What I am saying is that in both cases it was perfectly legal for me to do so. The ministry of magic are the ones breaking their own laws here."

This predictably confused the staff from the Prophet. "Ok, could you explain that for us please?"

For an answer Harry placed his hand palm down on the table between them, Hermione did the same next to her betrothed and the photographer sprang into action. He took his first picture of the day, but what a picture!

Harry spelled it out for them. "I am Lord Harry James Potter, head of the noble and ancient house of Potter. Miss Hermione Jane Granger here is my betrothed. Her parents are my legal guardians in the non-magical world while under the protection of house Potter in ours."

The reporter was glad his dictaquill was getting all this on parchment, they were about to turn the whole episode on its head. Especially since he realised Lord Potter was just getting started!

"For someone of the stature of the DMLE head to apparate into my home is appalling, to then compound matters by barging in uninvited through the door is an unforgivable breach of etiquette, manners

and the laws of the land. The idea of the minister placing me in protective custody is ludicrous, where was this offer of protection when I was left to battle Voldemort with only my friends for assistance? One week the ministry wants me to accept an Order of Merlin, the next they're attempting to arrest me, what way is that to run a country?"

The reporter wanted to be sure he heard right, "They offered you an Order of Merlin?"

Harry nodded in conformation, "It was offered and immediately declined, I refuse to be associated with the ministry of magic under Fudge's leadership. I have done nothing wrong yet I would have faced some sort of trial on trumped-up charges and of course been found guilty. Lucius Malfoy was caught red-handed breaking the law and appeared on the front page of your own paper yet walked free. No trial, no truth serum, the minister just decided his friend couldn't possibly be guilty and bypassed the entire justice system. Lucius Malfoy was the one who was responsible for the basilisk being released inside Hogwarts but the minister still thinks this wizard can do no wrong. I was left to fight the beast while our esteemed minister, with not a shred of evidence, arrested Hagrid and put him in Azkaban. The ministry can't even keep Sirius Black in Azkaban yet they're going to protect me? No thanks!"

Harry stopped for a drink of water as Hermione held his hand and Emma placed her hand on his shoulder to offer support. "With a good headmistress now in charge at Hogwarts, my betrothed and I were considering returning there in September. After this attempt by the ministry to gain control of my life we are now heading for Europe and already have a meeting arranged with the headmistress of Beauxbatons in France. Britain holds no appeal for me now."

The reporter couldn't believe what he was hearing, he would love to be a fly on the wall when Fudge reads this. He turned his attention to the girl for a moment. "Miss Granger, can I ask how you feel about leaving Hogwarts and all your friends?"

She smiled sweetly at him, "Oh that won't be a problem. Our friends will probably be coming with us when we choose a new school. Hopefully this one has no Voldemort possessed teachers or trolls attacking you when you're in the toilet."

The Granger parents held no objections either, both couldn't wait to stress how keen they were to move to the continent and place their daughter in a school where she wouldn't be called a mudblood by the heir of the Malfoy family.

The reporter would now rather be a fly on the wall at Malfoy Manor when this story hit, he was sure the stoic Slytherins would have a reaction worth recording. His last port of call for questions was the goblin leader. "Sir, can I assume from your presence here today that you can confirm all Lord Potter's claims?"

Ragnok nodded regally, "I was present when Lord Potter's family ring accepted him as head of House Potter. Gringotts also handled all the documents pertaining to his betrothal and legal guardianship in the non-magical world. The goblins were also responsible for erecting the wards at the home the DMLE head attempted to breach and I am insulted by the ministry's claim that dark magic was used. Once the wards recognised the ministry official meant Lord Potter, or those under his protection, harm they would be evicted immediately. Not dark magic, just goblin ingenuity and know-how. The goblin nation expects a public apology from the ministry otherwise we would have to examine that establishment's slur under goblin law and large fines would undoubtedly be levied against them."

Oh wow! How was it possible for Dolores Umbridge to make so many mistakes her first day in the job and how did this reflect on the person who appointed her? This was going to cause eruptions the length and breadth of the country as the photographer finished taking a few posed shots. Both then shot back to the Prophet office as quickly as possible, this material could even rate a special edition!

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Amelia was sitting in her new office at Hogwarts pondering a problem, a problem that she didn't know who to ask for advice. None of the current staff or portraits of former headmasters could help her with this one. Both Susan and Hannah had approached her about dropping muggle studies from their third year timetables. That in itself was not a problem, it was the reason behind the move that had her flummoxed! The girls had been very excited before going to Hermione's for defence lessons and had studied the Hogwarts

recommended muggle studies textbook so they would hopefully not make fools of themselves. Their short stay at the Grangers and subsequent shopping trip with Emma was enough to convince both girls that the course Hogwarts taught bore no relation to the reality they were faced with and was a complete waste of time. This was something Amelia would have to address but she herself had no experience of muggle society. The only two muggles she knew were the Granger parents and she was loathed to discuss the matter with them. The headmistress didn't want to mention anything that would show Hogwarts in a bad light while courting their children's attendance next year.

Her deputy was no more comfortable in muggle society than she was though did offer a good suggestion. Katie Bell and Dean Thomas both had mothers who were teachers in the muggle education system. Neither Amelia nor Minerva was certain if Hogwarts was ready to have a muggle teaching in the castle just yet, that didn't mean the two women couldn't 'run their eye over' the course currently being offered. Minerva was going to make contact and offer a couple of days holiday in the castle for both families as an enticement to get their assistance. Having some muggle educators see if the course they currently offered was fit for purpose would at least alert them if there was a problem with it. This visit would also give them a chance to see where their children were taught and could be a precursor to other muggle families being offered the same opportunity. The Granger parents quickly sprang to mind!

Amelia checked her to-do list again, Septima Vector's acceptance of the head of Slytherin position removed one of her main concerns. Arthur Weasley had allowed her to score another one off her list. His son Charlie apparently inherited his love of wild creatures from his father. It was only meeting a certain Molly Prewitt that stopped Arthur working on some magical animal reserve. His wife had managed to switch his fascination from Norwegian Ridgebacks to all things non-magical. Collecting plugs and batteries was a lot cheaper and safer than creatures which possessed wicked teeth, razor-sharp claws and combusive halitosis.

With Arthur Weasley as the new care of magical creatures professor, that left only the history post needing to be filled at the moment. Arthur would be staying at home and flooing to the castle for work everyday, both Amelia and Minerva were more than happy with that

arrangement. Neither had been looking forward to the prospect of Molly Weasley staying in the castle with nothing to do but loudly 'pointing-out' to everyone how they weren't doing their jobs properly and offering unwanted advice. Molly remaining in Devon would make everyone in the castle a lot happier.

Minerva had already contacted someone regarding the vacant potions position and Amelia agreed with her judgment, they would discover in the next few days if they were successful.

The wards alerted Amelia that her next scheduled meeting was about to arrive so the headmistress put her game face on. This employee was going to have to realise that there were new rules in effect and that those rules applied to him too, the only other alternative was leaving the castle.

Hagrid entered the office and immediately missed the presence of Albus Dumbledore. He was forced to admit though that the choice of Arthur Weasley to teach creatures was inspired, he well remembered Arthur from his time here as a student. He had immediately promised to help Arthur in any way he could, that was assuming he still had a job himself. Bones didn't appear to be too happy with him.

"Hagrid, I'm not one of these people who beat about the bush so I'll get straight to the reason behind why I summoned you here. Giant three-headed dogs, acromantulas, dragons or their eggs and creatures of that ilk have no place in any school I run. Neither does taking students into the forbidden forest, this applies doubly so at night!"

Hagrid was currently wondering if his meagre savings would last him one week or two after he lost his job? He supposed that would be entirely dependent on how much of it he spent in the pub!

Amelia wasn't finished with him though. "Those are my rules and any other creatures I haven't mentioned by name that you wish approval for, simply ask and I will soon tell you whether they are allowed. If you can follow these simple rules then I would be delighted to see you continue in your current post at Hogwarts."

Hagrid now wore a massive smile of relief. "Thank yeh, thank yeh, I won't let yeh down!"

Amelia smiled back at the biggest child it was her pleasure to know. "I'm sure you won't Hagrid but I thought we needed this meeting to clear the air. After the scandal of having a basilisk making its way around the castle last year, the school can't afford to have any more 'exotic' creatures anywhere near the children. Now I have something here for you, Harry wanted to send you this using Hedwig but didn't think that would be a smart move at the moment."

Hagrid's hand dwarfed the large envelope he received from Amelia and his smile unbelievably grew even wider. "Arthur told me about him takin' up his head o' house position. Bloody brilliant about him an' Hermione too! Made fer each other 'em two were."

Amelia watched as Hagrid's expression went from happiness to astonishment before he burst into tears of joy. She now passed on the verbal message she'd been asked to deliver. "Harry told me you gave him two of his most prized possessions, Hedwig and a certain photo album. He thought this was the least he could do for one of his best friends." The sound of Hagrid blowing his nose rattled the windows. "Personally I would like to add my own thanks to you. Very few people can hold up their hands and say they did their best for that young man, Rubeus Hagrid is one of them!"

Hagrid was now bawling, "I took him from his crib tha' night, I even spoke to Black! If tha' murderin' bastard comes anywhere near tha' lad, I'll wring his traitorous neck!"

The auror in Amelia had her asking Hagrid a few questions on that subject before moving on to talk about his all-expenses paid trip to the dragon reserve Harry had arranged for him. It was a very happy Hagrid who left the headmistresses office with pleasant thoughts of soon being able to see Norbert again.

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Sirius had been making good time as the big black dog worked its way inland. The circumstances he found himself in were dictating his destination. He had no idea where either Harry or his girlfriend lived, unless he could narrow that down to a general location he would be forced to anticipate where Harry would be. Padfoot was well acquainted with the countryside around Hogsmead and was hoping his animagus form and local knowledge would be a key factor in

preventing his capture. The marauders had spent many an evening roaming through the countryside and forest there so he would have home field advantage. There would also be enough rabbits and other sources of food available, that should aid his recovery from many years of being confined to that cell and forced to eat the muck they passed off as food.

A big part of Sirius wanted to immediately go searching around the UK for his godson but he had to ruthlessly suppress that impulse. His godson would be there on the first of September and so would the rat, one thing his stay in Azkaban taught Sirius was patience. When they got here he would then be able to protect his godson and have his revenge on the rat, what was six weeks compared to that? It was surrendering to his impulses that saw him end up in Azkaban in the first place, he should never have let Hagrid take Harry away from him. The only person Sirius would allow to take his godson from him again would be female and pretty like that brunette Harry had his arm around in the picture, anyone else would have a fight on their hands.

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With Remus agreeing to accompany the Grangers on their search for a new school, there would now be a party of six heading for France. That Remus could also drive was a bonus they intended to exploit. Since Harry had basically never been anywhere, the idea now was to turn this trip into a holiday for him, and everyone else. Dan had always wanted to hire one of the large American-style RV's but could never justify the extravagance to himself since there was only the three of them, there was also the added problem that these vehicles were just too large for navigating most of the country roads in Britain. With six of them heading for the South of France this was the perfect opportunity to live one of his dreams. When Dobby demonstrated the shrinking charm, both adult Grangers were ecstatic! Dan was thinking they could take the bicycles and his golf clubs without having to worry about space while Emma was saved the dilemma of deciding what clothes to take and those that needed to be left behind. Discovering that the little guy could shrink the cars to the size of a bar of soap cemented their plans. The RV would be great on the motorways and they would still have the cars for exploring the surrounding countryside when the RV was parked in their chosen camps.

Harry was trembling with excitement as they had maps spread out on the kitchen table, he was discovering that planning an adventure could be as much fun as going on it. Luna was there and her opinions were asked for too, after discovering she loved to hike they added one to the holiday itinerary. Bicycles would also be purchased for her and Harry as that was also part of the holiday. Remus would accompany the kids on the hike while Dan and Emma loved cycling, they wouldn't exactly be roughing it as the RV and a hot meal would be waiting for them at the end of their journey.

With Dobby's ability to remain unseen he would be accompanying the group on their vacation, he still wanted to do all the cooking and cleaning and Emma wanted to kiss him for that. Harry had to make the elf promise not to go looking for work though, it wasn't too hard to imagine waking in the morning to a campsite that had suddenly become immaculate overnight. Harry didn't want to have to try and explain that one to the camp owners.

They would try to keep their heads down for the four days it would be before the hire of the RV. The group would leave together to pick it up and then Dobby could transport and pack all their gear into it when they stopped at the first layby. It would then be off to Dover, catch the ferry to Calais for a great holiday and maybe even a new life.

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Molly was still on the outs with her family and also believed every word printed in the Prophet. When she read that Harry had attacked the head of the DMLE her temper exploded. She rounded on her two youngest children only to be very quickly verbally slapped down by her husband.

"Molly enough! I was there and that story has a higher manure content than the stuff we put on our rhubarb."

Ron silently swore he would never eat rhubarb crumble again, he much preferred custard on his sweets. Molly was taken aback at the ferocity of her husband's rebuke, the effect magnified by the fact that it was in front of the children as well.

"Perhaps if my family told me what was happening I wouldn't need to read about these things in the paper?"

Arthur rose from the table as he spoke, he'd quite a lot to do today. "The next edition of the Prophet should carry the real story and will be delivered before we leave for Egypt tomorrow. I suggest you content yourself until then and work on your annoying habit of making declarations about things you know nothing about."

Molly's temper was not so easily brushed aside. "Whose fault is it I know nothing about this? My own family is keeping secrets from me."

Her family was currently leaving the table when her youngest son answered. "It's not a secret, just none of your business. Your interference in things you had no right to already almost cost me my best friends. Whatever happens with either Harry or Hermione is going to stay just that, none of your business."

Molly was just about to chew Ron's head off when Arthur interrupted before she could get started. "Our son is following instructions handed out by me. If I hear of you trying to interfere in Harry Potter's life again, I can assure you the consequences won't be to your liking."

Everyone left as Molly sat there stunned into silence, she sat and stared into space for hours. The kids came in and helped themselves to sandwiches rather than ask her to make lunch, probably just as well as she didn't feel capable of the task at the moment. Arthur had never spoken to her like that in all their years of marriage, being reprimanded, far less in front of their children, was not something she was used to.

She was still sitting there contemplating her life when an owl delivered a special edition of the Prophet, the picture on the front page answered a lot of Molly's questions that her family wouldn't. Harry was sitting beside Hermione with her parents supportively standing behind the pair. It was their hands that told the real story though, or rather the rings that were clearly visible. The headline dispelled any doubts and all Molly's hopes for her daughter.

Lord Potter Betrothed!

This was like being stabbed through the heart with an icicle for Molly. She skimmed over the story that went on to describe his relationship

with the Grangers, it also destroyed the ministry's case against him. It was now clear the ministry had broken their own laws by forcing their way into his home and attempting to place him into protective custody. The lad even managed to stick the knife into Malfoy and cast more than a few aspersions on his claimed innocence. The bit that really took the breath from Molly was the detail that he was leaving the country to look at schools abroad, Hermione's comment that most of their friends would be coming with them soon saw her breath return with a vengeance. The cry of 'Ginny!' reverberated all through the burrow.

Ginny had known this would be coming when the next issue of the Prophet arrived and was prepared, the young girl entered the kitchen ready for the expected battle.

Molly hardly gave her time to come through the doorway, "Who are these friends who are leaving Hogwarts with them? I sincerely hope none of them have the last name Weasley?"

Ginny's insides may be shaking with fear but she presented a calm front to her mother. "They haven't definitely decided if they will be leaving yet but dad has already given both me and Ron permission to join them at whatever school they choose if we want to."

Molly felt as if she'd been physically struck. "Your father knows about this? He's going to be teaching at Hogwarts next year!"

Ginny nodded in answer, "Yes dad knows, so does Headmistress Bones. Professor McGonagall was the one who arranged them an introduction to the French school. They all want what's best for our friends."

Molly was having trouble understanding this. "But Hogwarts..."

Ginny angrily interrupted her mother, "Almost got me killed! The man who was responsible got away with it because we have a minister who can be bought with gold. The same minister who sacked dad and ordered Harry's arrest." Ginny could see her mother joining up the dots between those events and continued in a quieter tone. "If Harry and Hermione choose to finish their schooling abroad then it's a fair bet me, Ron and at least Luna will be going with them."

Ginny took a slim book from her pocket and handed it to her mother, "We knew about Harry and Hermione's betrothal, I told you no other girl had a chance with him. Percy let me use Hermes to get a few books on betrothals from Flourish and Blotts. There is a very interesting section in this that tells you in great detail what happens to anyone trying to interfere with the betrothal of the head of an ancient and noble house. I suggest you read it mum before doing anything stupid, everyone says Azkaban is a horrible place." It was a trembling Ginny that left her mother staring at the book, she silently vowed to speak to Bill at the earliest opportunity when they reached Egypt. This was too big for her to deal with and she needed help.

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Emma was closely watching the changes that were gradually taking over her husband and liking them very much. The extra edition of the Prophet had placed a large smile on his face, even if he couldn't show it to his friends down the golf club. Golf was also featuring heavily in the conversations at the moment as Dan and the three kids were still pouring over the maps and their proposed route. They were searching for a golf course close to their route that also had some shopping for the ladies close by, that would keep them happy while the males hit little white balls around the French countryside.

Luna had been shopping with them a few times now and had practically moved in to the Grangers' home. Having friends was a new experience for Luna, never mind preparing to go on holiday with them. Harry's excitement and enthusiasm was bubbling over and seeing him so happy was affecting everyone. Even Dobby was caught up in this and was now making croissants for breakfast with French dishes for either lunch or dinner. Dan and Emma were totally in awe of the little guy and swore he would never have to worry about not having a family again, he was certainly a welcome addition to theirs. The elf was now sure he was the luckiest in the world, escaping the Malfoys and ending up here was beyond his wildest dreams.

Hermione was thinking that she, Harry and Luna had all been rather lonely over the previous summers and realised there was one more name she could add to that list. She would have a quiet word later and ask her mother if there was any way they could add a name to their holiday adventure. If Hermione got the answer she expected,

they could all go and visit Neville tomorrow and hope his grandmother would let him come along. The four of them could have a lot of fun together and another opinion on Beauxbatons would certainly be welcome.

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The atmosphere inside the minister's office was a lot less jovial than it had been earlier in the day. The special edition of the Prophet had instantly wiped out any support the earlier edition had swung to the ministry, this was graphically demonstrated by the flock of owls the ministry was once more besieged by. In every case, the owl's owner was expressing their displeasure at the ministry's handling of this matter, that those same owners were also voters had Fudge in a tizzy.

"We can't even contact the brat and attempt to offer an apology, those wards have removed all trace of that home from the ministry records. I've already sacked Weasley, let Bones go and Augusta Longbottom wouldn't spit on any of us if we were on fire! I don't know anyone else who might know where he is, what the hell are we going to do?"

Delores wanted to set dementors on the entire family, not something Cornelius and Lucius were necessarily against. Since they didn't know the location to send the dementors, the question was academic anyway. Lucius hadn't a lot more to offer at the moment. If Potter left the country, citing ministerial interference as the reason, Fudge was finished. Any new minister would want to appease the masses and get the boy back, Lucius could easily see himself undergoing a trial to publicly show Potter the new minister was different. His master would probably kill him anyway when he returned and discovered the boy who defied him had left the country. A solution needed to be found, and quickly.

"Cornelius, sometimes a situation will arise where two advisories want the same thing for different reasons. In the circumstances I think it's important to recognise this and take the appropriate action." It was difficult to tell if Fudge was confused by this since he always looked like that, Dolores on the other hand couldn't hide it.

"What do you mean Lucius?"

He hated working with idiots but needs must, Lucius explained as if to a child. "Amelia Bones won't want Potter and his little entourage going anywhere other than Hogwarts for his education, that makes her an ally in our cause and you can bet she has a means to contact the brat. Get in touch with her and find out what Potter's really after. If nothing else you should be able to use her enough to get a message through that this is all a massive misunderstanding." He then spelt it out to them in terms even they couldn't misunderstand. "If Potter isn't on the Hogwarts express on the first of September then you two will be out of a job by Halloween!"

Dolores was well aware either of these two would sacrifice her to save their own skin but wondered if Lucius wasn't over-reacting. "They wouldn't dare sack us?"

Lucius gave the ugly woman a dangerous smile, "Tell that to Dumbledore! He's currently lying in a cell thinking the same thing. A few weeks ago he was politically the most powerful wizard in the country, now he can only sit on his bunk and wait to see what he's charged with."

Dolores couldn't argue against that point but it brought up another question. "I still don't understand why we haven't charged him with anything yet. Surely that would appease that little shit Potter?"

Lucius still wore that same dangerous smile but appeared to have turned up the power a notch or two. "Patience Dolores, Dumbledore is our ace in the hole, or should that be cell? If things appear to be going badly for us we still have him to wheel out and divert attention away from us. We are also tempering our weapon as he sits there with nothing to do but contemplate his fall from grace. We can strip him of his titles, empty his vaults and even cancel his chocolate frog card from being printed. We emphasise that Potter is behind all of this before quietly arranging Dumbledore's escape. The old wizard's pride will demand retribution, basically we just wind him up and point him at Potter. Whatever the result, it's all good for us."

Cornelius now felt better that at least they had a semblance of a plan. That this plan consisted of Lucius Malfoy telling him what to do was also comforting, normal service had been resumed.

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Sibyll didn't think she would ever feel normal again, she currently had two foreigners residing in her body. One of them was a dream come true and she already loved her unborn child with all her heart. The other was a nightmare that she tried to tell herself couldn't hurt her child. She was also trying to convince Frank their child was safe, her reasoning sounded good but didn't appear to help either of them.

"The chances of our child being magical are thousands to one against, not something we should lose sleep over love. If any of the three versions of this tosser currently in the house moved into our baby, they would be confining themselves to that body for life and be totally dependent on us to raise them. I don't see any of them rushing to do that as they have nothing to gain and everything to lose."

Frank understood Sibyll's reasoning perfectly well, it didn't mean he would worry any less.

"I feel Tom's presence less and less. I know it sounds crazy but it's almost as if our baby is pushing his evilness out of its mother. Boy or girl, the little tyke is a fighter!"

Frank took her hand and raised it to his lips, "When I dreamt of fathering a child I always imagined them as being the picture of health. I never once considered if they would be magical or in danger of possession from some nutter. Are you sure the magical people wouldn't be able to help us with this?"

Sibyll smiled at his naivety at the way the magical world worked, she tried to explain it to him again. "Love, you're a muggle and I'm a squib! If they found out killing us would rid the world of Voldemort forever, they wouldn't hesitate for an instant. Neither the thought of taking our lives, or that of our baby's would stay their hand. When you think of how many people he murdered the last time, it's hard to blame them. You fought in a war Frank, if killing two unimportant people would stop another one, what do you think your government would do?"

When Sibyll put it like that, there really was only one conclusion to draw. If killing two people could stop the troubles in Ireland, they would already be dead and everyone would be celebrating. If it wasn't for the fact Sibyll had Tom in her head, he would put a bullet through his brain to protect her and their baby. Giving his life so his

son or daughter and the woman he loved could live was a price Frank would gladly pay, he would consider it a fair bargain!

The spirit that was Voldemort stood and watched this conversation, totally ignored and even less able to do anything about the situation. Both his horcruxes were barely hanging on and watching these two as they held hands while discussing baby names was making him nauseous. As the baby grew, so did the bond of love between all three of them. He'd never understood parents throwing themselves in front of curses meant for their children, it just made them easier to kill since their parent was now dead. If that was what love made you do, Voldemort was glad he never had anything to do with that emotion.

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Dobby returned with the message that Neville would be delighted to see them, he took Harry and Hermione first and then quickly followed with Luna and Emma. The rather large manor house that they were faced with was rather imposing, a bit like Augusta Longbottom herself. Neville took his three friends into the grounds, he was desperate to show them his new greenhouse and Emma wanted a private word with Augusta.

The two women were sitting in a rather lovely sun room drinking tea before Emma brought up the reason she was here. "On Saturday we leave for an extended holiday in France, Luna is coming with us and Hermione approached me about adding Neville too. Dan and I think that's a great idea but wanted to ask you before I mention it to your grandson."

Augusta was gobsmacked at that idea and her immediate instinct was to say yes. Neville's confidence was growing by leaps and bounds from spending time with his friends and this was something Augusta certainly wanted to encourage. Once she heard their plans, her decision was an easy one to make.

"Emma, it will of course be Neville's choice but he certainly has my blessing to accompany you. I can't thank you enough for not only thinking about Neville but including him in your family's plans."

"It was not a hard thing to do Augusta, Neville is a credit to you and one of Hermione and Harry's best friends. This is Hermione's idea

and the sight of my daughter spending her summer holiday with her friends makes me happier than I can say. As non-magical parents, sending our daughter to a magical school was one of the hardest decisions we've ever faced as parents. To be honest with you Augusta, it's only meeting Harry and her friends this summer that have finally convinced Dan and I we made the right choice."

Augusta couldn't contain her smile, "I suppose your daughter becoming betrothed to Lord Potter would kind of force that choice on you?"

Emma couldn't believe it, vulture hat wearing Augusta Longbottom apparently possessed a wicked sense of humour! She couldn't help but laugh, "Actually it was Dan who arranged that with Harry, the Granger girls didn't know anything about it. Needless to say, neither Hermione nor myself raised too many objections."

Neville was floored when he returned to find his gran laughing with Hermione's mother, after hearing he was invited to go on holiday with his friends he was rendered speechless. He did manage to nod his head in a yes before being mobbed by a happy Hermione, Harry and Luna. This holiday was going to be the best ever for all four of them, not because of where they were going but because they were going there together.

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A big black dog that currently was foraging through the bins in Hogsmead was not a sight that would alarm too many people. Had they known it was looking for newspapers as much as food it may have raised an eyebrow or two. Had they seen the dog reading the papers it had found then all hell would have broken loose.

Sirius was struggling to believe that Hogsmead wasn't crawling with aurors and had suspected a trap, after finding copies of today's newspapers he understood. There was hardly a mention of escaped madman Sirius Black in the newspapers, his godson had monopolised the news once more and this time didn't need to fight a basilisk to do it.

He was outraged at how the ministry appeared to have declared war on Harry, using his escape as an excuse was rubbing Padfoot's nose in it. When he read how his godson had not only countered

every one of their claims but shafted Fudge, Umbridge and Malfoy at the same time, his heart almost burst with pride. His godson was a marauder!

His blood ran cold though at the thought of his godson leaving Britain but it was the 'taking their friends with them' that saw 'patient Sirius' consigned to the same bin he got the papers from. The rat leaving Britain with Harry demanded action now, if that meant taking some insane risks then so be it.

He now had some information to work with, Harry was with Hermione and her parents were some type of muggle healer. It was the general location mentioned that gave him hope, Crawley in West Sussex wasn't much to go on but it was all he had. He would have to wait for someone staggering drunkenly out one of the pubs tonight and try to borrow their wand without raising the alarm. A quick apparition and then he would search house to house if he had to, Padfoot's nose would be his best tool in trying to track the child who used to ride around the room on his back. Yes the place would probably be heaving with aurors trying to find Harry but Sirius was now on the clock, he would protect his godson even if it cost him his life.

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 13

The house that Bill had managed to rent for them was like nothing Ginny had ever seen before. It even had an internal courtyard that boasted a fountain in the centre of it, she could easily imagine herself sitting there quite happily during the hottest part of the day. She'd been quiet as Bill had led them through a local market that he called a bazaar, Ginny wasn't sure if that shouldn't be bizarre with some of the wares they had on sale. She'd enjoyed the food they'd had for dinner though definitely didn't want to know what it was or what was in it.

Now her apprehension was reaching record levels as her opportunity to have a quiet word with her oldest and favourite brother was getting closer.

Bill was many things but stupid wasn't one of them, he'd picked up on the tension between his parents immediately. This was such an unusual occurrence for it to be practically unmissable. That the rest of his siblings appeared to have major problems with their mother was also obvious.

Bill had been in the middle of nowhere on an absolute swine of a dig when the owl from his father found him. He'd been forced to call in quite a few favours to get the time off and make all the arrangements. Bill was really pleased to see nearly all his family but had no idea why they had suddenly descended upon him or how they were able to afford it. He was looking forward to having a quiet word with his dad to find out just what the hell he'd missed in the last couple of months.

His sister though had other ideas, "Bill, can I have a word with you? In private."

The only other person still up at this point was Arthur who also wasn't stupid, he was aware that Ginny always looked up to Bill in more ways than just their differences in height accounted for. His daughter's idea for a holiday in Egypt suddenly made more sense to her father. Arthur smiled as he got up and kissed his daughter on the forehead before heading off to bed. He did have a parting comment for her though. "You can speak to me about anything Ginny, you don't have to take the entire family on a two thousand mile trip just for a chat!"

Ginny would never hurt her father and tried to convey that. "I know dad and I love you for that. This is just something I need to discuss with Bill first."

Arthur couldn't be upset with his little girl, especially not after almost losing her. "Ok princess, just don't stay up too late though. We've got a busy day tomorrow and some pyramids to see."

Bill was now really worried, what could be so bad that Ginny couldn't tell dad but had to come all the way to Egypt to see him? If it was something some boy had done to her, Bill would be back in Britain tomorrow and murder would be on the agenda.

As soon as her dad left, Ginny couldn't hold it any longer. She blurted it out while bolting into Bill's now waiting arms. "It's mum Bill, I can't speak to dad about it because he would cast her from the family. We came here because I couldn't think of anyone else to tell."

Bill had a horrible vision of his sister catching their mum with another man before ruthlessly quashing it. Their mother was far from perfect by any means but that was just something she would never do. Bill sat Ginny on the couch beside him, still keeping his arms around the now crying girl. "Ok, I think my favourite sister needs to start from the very beginning and tell me the full story."

Ginny hadn't travelled all this way to leave anything out, she laid bare her soul. She told her brother about crushing on Harry Potter, only to come down to breakfast one morning and find him sitting at their kitchen table. He'd at least heard of dad's fight in Diagon Alley with Lucius Malfoy and wondered why Ginny was bringing it up now. When she mentioned writing in a diary that wrote back to her, every one of Bill's highly honed curse breaking senses were screaming danger at him.

When Ginny said she was lonely at Hogwarts Bill resolved to be having words with his brothers in the morning, that was until he remembered his own time there. Bill was in sixth year and Charlie fifth by the time Percy arrived at the castle. Between being buried in course work, Quidditch and chasing after girls, neither of the two elder brothers did anything more than ensure Percy was at meals

and nobody was bothering him. He was surprised at Ron though until Ginny exonerated him.

"Ron is so close to Harry and Hermione that it would be difficult for anyone to break into that group, they're already famous at Hogwarts, make that Britain! He was there for me when I really needed him though. It turned out that the diary was a horcrux of Tom Marvolo Riddle, better known as Lord Voldemort. It was taking control and forcing me to set a basilisk on the rest of the school. I ended up lying dying in Slytherin's secret chamber while the school was getting ready to be closed. Mum and dad were sitting in the head's office crying."

Bill was now holding his sister tighter, even the idea of a horcrux or a basilisk scared the shit out of him, both didn't bear thinking about. The mantra of 'she's here and ok' was going through his head while trying not to imagine the terror that their parents must have been going through at the time. Ron just earned everlasting forgiveness from Bill with Ginny's next words.

"Hermione was petrified in the infirmary but had managed to find out what was going on before it happened. She had it all written down and Harry found it, he and Ron came for me! Ron got trapped underground by a cave-in but Harry managed through and fought the basilisk with Gryffindor's sword before pulling its fang out of his own arm and destroying the diary with it."

Bill had to interrupt. "Ginny, have you any idea how crazy this all sounds?"

She nodded in agreement before pulling out the Prophet articles she'd brought to Egypt for this very purpose. Ginny well understood her brother's scepticism, she was there and still had trouble believing it.

Bill was silent while he read article after article, his eyes would continually keep shifting toward Ginny. It was almost as if to make sure she was still sitting there, alive and well.

"Ginny, this is pretty amazing stuff but I still can't see what this has to do with mum?"

Ginny lowered her head, she couldn't face Bill and say the next bit. "Mum is determined I'm to be Harry Potter's girlfriend."

Bill fought hard not to laugh, "Ginny, I would imagine every mother in Britain with a daughter between the ages of seven and twenty seven would want them to be Harry Potter's girlfriend!"

Ginny cut him off from saying anymore. "I'll bet they wouldn't insult his present girlfriend to her face when they came to their house to make that same daughter rich. Nor would they suggest to their daughter there are ways to get a certain boy if they really want to. Harry is now Lord Potter and betrothed to his girlfriend Hermione, do you know what would happen when mum tries to interfere? You know what mum's like when she takes something into her head, everyone of us has told her she was wrong but I just don't see her giving up on this. The whole thing's got me terrified Bill. Even if Harry didn't press charges, dad would throw her out the family."

Bill got Ginny to tell him the rest of the story and found himself agreeing with his now rich little sister. If their mother was prepared to have the rest of the family not speaking to her over this, she wasn't going to give up on it easily. He also understood Ginny's fear of their dad casting their mother out of the family if she took this any further. People who dismissed Arthur Weasley as nothing more than a hen pecked husband did so at their peril. They would soon get a rude awakening if Arthur's family or the Weasley family honour was threatened.

He hugged his sister before kissing her goodnight on the forehead. "Ok Ginny, time for you to call it a night. I'll take it from here but give me some time to think this over before I confront mum. Do you want to be there when I do?"

Ginny couldn't decide, she did feel so much better though after having told Bill everything. "I don't know, I'll go with whatever you think is best."

Bill nodded in agreement. "I'll let you know before I speak to her but you need to stop worrying about it, let me deal with it now. I'm sorry my favourite sister couldn't have the prince of her dreams, this Harry Potter seems such a nice guy too."

Ginny cuddled into her brother's broad chest before replying. "I think Ron said it best the night we were all in the infirmary. Harry came for me while the famous Gilderoy Lockheart was pissing himself with fear, what more could you ask for in a friend? Hermione is also really nice and a friend now too."

Bill sat alone in the quiet of the Egyptian night, trying to sort out his thoughts from Ginny's quite incredible tale. She'd left him the articles and his eyes kept returning to the one of Ron, Harry and his now betrothed Hermione. Bill understood his father's position perfectly, Ginny would have been dead but for the actions of the people in the photograph. To actually then insult them in any way was practically unforgivable, especially when they were there to make his two youngest siblings rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Bill hadn't seen Ron in quite a while and the changes in the lad were nothing short of astonishing, if Harry's friendship played any part in that then his mother's behaviour was even harder to explain. Ginny had done her bit and Bill was loath to involve her further, it was up to him now. He would watch his family closely tomorrow and then try to engineer a discussion with his mother, preferably somewhere he could set up silencing charms. Bill had a feeling those charms would be tested to their limit.

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Frank felt totally useless, probably because at the moment he was. The expectant father was relegated to the role of holding Sibyl's hair out the way as she threw-up again in the toilet. He was at least able to offer some comfort and rub her back with his other hand as the morning sickness had once more made its presence known. Frank wanted her to see a doctor but she had no records of any kind in the muggle world. She also vetoed the idea of approaching one of her own type of doctors since they were both currently carrying about bits of dark lord inside them.

Frank's concern skyrocketed when Sybil suddenly began to convulse, these severe reactions were soon accompanied by black tar-like gunk oozing from her nostrils. Frank had a cool wet cloth ready to put on her brow when she was finished throwing up but now used it to wipe away the worse of the mess, he was really concerned her airways may become blocked. Passing the last of the black gunk coincided with her convulsions stopping but the mother

of his unborn child was now unconscious. Frank's hearing was so poor he couldn't rely on it to check Sibyl's heart was still beating but his shaving mirror steamed up when held at her mouth. There was some relief that Sibyl was at least still breathing.

Frank possessed neither the strength nor agility to lift Sibyl into their bedroom but was desperate to make her more comfortable. He hated leaving her even for a moment but the toilet floor was not the best place for his pregnant love to be lying. He quickly returned carrying a quilt and a pillow and at least tried to keep her warm, with Sibyl now wrapped in the quilt and her head resting on the pillow on his lap, all he could do was wait.

It took almost twenty minutes for Sibyl to gradually wake up, twenty of the worst minutes of Frank's life. He leaned down and kissed her cheek. "You, young lady, just about scared the bloody life out of me!"

Sibyl couldn't help but smile back up at him. "I think our baby just pushed Tom out of me. Did you feel the backlash?"

"No, I didn't feel a thing. Are you sure he left?" Frank then had a horrifying thought. "He couldn't have moved into our baby, could he?"

Sibyl tried to reassure her man. "That's not possible Frank, our baby isn't physically or mentally developed enough to support Tom yet. I can't sense him at all, he's really gone!"

Frank still wasn't one hundred percent convinced. "You felt the one on the train and we both were hit by the surge when I shot that goblin thing. Why would Tom dying be any different?"

"I don't know love, he's been getting weaker for days. It almost feels as if he just passed away. Perhaps it's like dying from natural causes, not that there is anything natural about a horcrux."

Frank wasn't totally convinced but had other things to deal with first. "Let's get you up off this floor and into bed, then I'll fix us both a cup of tea. I know I could bloody use one."

Frank helped Sibyl to rise before she then had to help him to his feet. His old war wound didn't take to kindly to sitting on a cold toilet floor

with Sibyl resting on it. When they were both standing, there was a hug of relief before heading in the direction of the bedroom. They got on so well together because both thought they were the lucky one in the relationship, a relationship neither of them expected nor could still quite believe.

Frank tucked Sibyl into bed before heading off to the kitchen to brew the promised tea. When he returned Sibyl could see he'd made more than a cuppa, Frank had made his mind up about something. "Frank, what are you planning? Please don't do anything rash without discussing it with me first."

Frank held her hand, "Sibyl love, the last horcrux is in my head. If I go then so does he."

Sibyl was puzzled, "Where would you go Frank?" Realisation dawned for the former divination professor. "No, I refuse to let you do that. This baby of ours will need his or hers father to be there, nothing else is acceptable."

He was still holding her hand as he tried to explain. "Listen to me love, you and our baby are the most important things in the world to me now. We both know what would happen if this sick bastard ever got a new body. You, me and our baby would only be the first people he would kill. By doing this I can guarantee both your safety. I've lived my life and the last few months have easily been the best of it. I would have no hesitation in ending my life to protect my child and their mother, the woman I love."

Sibyl pulled Frank down on to the bed with her, all thoughts of tea forgotten at the moment as she held him close. "You listen to me Frank Bryce, I got Tom out of me without putting a bullet through my head. We've got time to work out why and try the same with you love."

Frank smiled at her, "I've listened as you described some of the wonderful things magic can do but I've never heard you mention it could get a man pregnant!"

Sibyl caught on fast that Frank was trying to divert her from changing his mind, she had no intention of being dissuaded. "You don't have to be carrying this baby to love it every bit as much as I do! Together the three of us can beat him, I won't have you

sacrificing yourself before we have tried everything we can. You said yourself that Riddle is getting weaker all the time, we can beat him! Yes we're on a time limit but that also means you don't have to do anything right now."

Their mugs of tea were ignored as the couple tried to resolve their most unusual problem, the tea wasn't the only thing being ignored in the Riddle house. The spirit that was Voldemort had watched from the background as the morning had played out. On the one hand he was incensed that he was being totally discounted and spoken about as if Lord Voldemort was of no consequence. While on the other hand, with only one horcrux now left, he was closer to death than at any time since before he finished Hogwarts.

That his remaining horcrux was lodged inside an old muggle who was currently having to be persuaded not to put a bullet through his own head terrified him like nothing before. He was going to have to leave Little Hangleton in search of some gullible followers, they would need to be coaxed or bullied into giving up one of their children for him to possess.

Being parents to the new dark lord could be made to seem attractive to a few of his followers, the names of Crabbe, Goyle and Bulstrode jumped to the fore as being stupid enough to believe his empty promises. His time teaching at Hogwarts reminded him that the Bulstrodes had a female child, if his geography was correct though, they were the nearest to his current location. There wasn't much between the three children in question by the way of their intelligence or magical power, perhaps he would have more luck as a dark lady than he did as the dark lord.

The main reason for deciding on this course of action was time. When these two eventually noticed he'd left here, the old muggle could quite easily decide it was now time to put an end to his own life and Lord Voldemort too! It was ironic that the vilest and most powerful dark lord this century had to stand there helpless while his fate hung in the balance, dependent on the love of a squib for an old muggle being strong enough to save both their lives. Voldemort also couldn't miss the irony that it was the love of a mother for her child that got him into this entire mess in the first place!

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Cornelius remembered nearly everything that Lucius had drummed into him as the Minister of Magic made his way to the new Headmistress of Hogwarts office. Yes, he may remember it, didn't mean he had to like it though! "Ah Amelia, so good to see you again. Are you settling into your new job?"

Amelia couldn't for the life of her think what this arse was doing here, she didn't intend to waste any time finding out. "I'm settling in fine Cornelius but I find myself incredibly busy. What can the Headmistress of Hogwarts do for you?"

Cornelius may have been well rehearsed in what to say, he just didn't possess Lucius Malfoy's skill for pulling it off. "My dear Amelia, it's more about what we can do for each other."

Amelia wasn't too sure what he meant by that, the facial expression he was attempting also failed miserably. She guessed he was going for reassuring but it looked more like he was constipated. For one awful moment there, she thought Fudge was making a pass at her. If he was then her new office would soon have a new decoration, the minister's reproductive equipment, framed and hanging on the wall, should make a nice conversation piece. It would at least give her somewhere else to hang her hat! "As I think I said Cornelius, I'm very busy. Could we please get to the point?"

He was annoyed that all the stuff he'd spent hours learning wouldn't be needed but consoled himself with the thought at least it would get him out of here quicker. "Amelia, I think it is in both Hogwarts and the ministry's best interests that the boy-who-lived remains in Britain. I'm sure you'll agree that Harry Potter attending Beauxbatons would be a disaster for us all."

The light of understanding finally went on in Amelia's mind, now all that she needed to do was decide how she wanted to play this. She decided to give the minister a little nudge, just to see how Cornelius would react and try to gauge exactly how serious he was about this. "Minister, in part I can't help but agree with you. To those ends myself and Hogwarts have done everything in our power to get the school to a point where Lord Potter would wish to return. A point I was pleased to say we'd reached only for the ministry to make a complete balls of the situation. Setting Umbridge on him and his family? Really Cornelius, what the hell were you thinking?"

The minister's face was scarlet as he fought valiantly to control his temper, Lucius had warned him that losing it was the worst thing he could do. "I am thinking that perhaps we could work together to achieve our mutual goal. You know the boy Amelia, what does he really want? I will of course apologise for the mistake over ministry employees entering his house uninvited, we just can't find him to do it properly. What will it take to keep the boy-who-lived in the country?"

Amelia didn't hesitate for a second. "Lucius Malfoy's head on a stick!" It was quite amusing to watch actually, she didn't know a human face could turn all those different colours. Amelia thought she was going to have to remind Cornelius to breathe after his shock at her answer. Amelia could be a lady if she wanted to be, she could also become an utter bitch when the occasion demanded it. She decided to put the boot in! "Lord Potter has stated publicly that he was pleased with the changes taking place at Hogwarts and was ready to return here in September. He also stated publicly that the ministry were the ones who screwed the entire situation up. There is also real animosity between him and the Malfoys. I've personally watched the boys memories and there is no room for doubt in my mind that Lucius Malfoy was responsible for the Basilisk that was released in this castle last year. Harry will never listen to or believe a word you say while you associate yourself with that man."

Cornelius was now starting to panic, "You're wrong Amelia, Lucius couldn't be responsible for that atrocity, not Lucius! Surely there is something else I can do to appease the boy?"

Amelia was well aware of his arguments to protect his friend Lucius, she'd heard them many times before. She reiterated her usual counter in the vain hope that this time he might actually listen. "Minister, if you're so sure that Lucius is completely innocent then you have nothing to fear. Have a hearing where he's questioned under veritaserum and that would clear everything up once and for all." She gave him a moment to ponder this before offering something else for consideration. "There is one other thing that might help you, Harry asked for a transcript from the trial of Sirius Black. That, combined with a public apology over the Umbridge incident, would be a start at mending fences with the boy."

Fudge was now looking a colour that resembled his lime green bowler hat, "I'm sorry Amelia but I just can't do that."

Amelia was now shaking her head, "Cornelius, if you are not prepared to apologise then I find myself questioning why you bothered even coming to Hogwarts today."

"I am quite prepared to apologise Amelia, I just can't hand over a copy of that trial transcript."

This refusal had Amelia puzzled, she could see no reason behind this decision. "Why ever not Cornelius, surely that is the least you can do? The whole of our world knows that Black betrayed the Potters and Harry has since discovered the man is actually his godfather. The boy wants to know, no, needs to know why Black did it. What possible reason could you have for denying him that right?"

"Amelia, nothing would please me more than to meet the boy's request. I can't hand it over because there is no transcript. There is no transcript because there never was a trial! Black was caught red-handed at the scene of Pettigrew's and a dozen muggle murders, they slapped him directly into Azkaban."

Amelia shot to her feet. "Are you telling me that Sirius Black has spent twelve years in Azkaban, and the dementors have been given permission to kiss him on sight, without the man ever having a trial?"

"Black was guilty Amelia, there was no need for a trial."

"So is Lucius Malfoy but he isn't getting a trial either, is he Cornelius? I think Harry Potter has the right idea, get as far away from the British ministry of magic as possible. I am now reconsidering my decision not to let my Susan go with him!"

Cornelius was rocked back in his seat by the venom contained in Amelia's voice. "I thought the ministry and Hogwarts could work together on this matter, it would appear I was mistaken."

Amelia had not sat back down yet, her temper still flaring. "Being mistaken is not exactly a new experience for you or your ministry Cornelius. I have to say though, admitting you were mistaken is a good start. As to the Lord Potter situation, I fear you may have burned your bridges. You set Lucius Malfoy free without the need for a trial, his godfather went to Azkaban again without trial. You set

Umbridge on him after sacking the father of his best friend. I think it's fair to say you won't be on the boy's Christmas card list."

It was a thoroughly dejected minister who left Hogwarts to make his way back to the ministry. Amelia was back sitting behind her desk, rapidly reaching the conclusion that there would be no more work done here until she had spoken to Harry. This was something he needed to know and as quickly as possible since he was leaving to go on holiday tomorrow. If things went as she feared on the continent, this might be one of the last times Amelia would see the lad. That she could no longer concentrate on what she'd been doing before that arse Cornelius showed up, and with Susan and Hannah already at the Grangers for a defence lesson, she made her mind up. Amelia would go now and get the bad news over with.

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Sirius had been searching all night, again with no luck. This had usually been his cue to hide for the day but he was now felt forced to continue searching in broad daylight. He just couldn't shake the feeling that time was running out fast. His animagus form that had kept Sirius safe was now going to work against him.

He'd learned enough about muggles from Lily to understand that two dentists would have a house in one of the better neighbourhoods. He'd now spent the last couple of nights sniffing around some really nice houses and reading the nameplates on the doors. He'd found Gardiners, Gordons and Grahams but so far no sign of Grangers. He'd also come across the occasional disillusioned Auror keeping watch. Sirius Black would probably have missed them but Padfoot had sniffed them out. One had been hiding behind a large scented shrub yet the smell of firewhisky had been clearly discernable to the dog's sensitive nose. The auror had obviously used a little help to put the night in, Sirius had been so tempted to lift his leg and take a leak on the bush. An auror drinking on the job deserved nothing less but his man priority had to be finding his godson. Pissing on and off aurors who'd been drinking would probably not help his chances of achieving this.

The big black dog that was such an advantage at night would stick out like a sore thumb in the lovely July sunshine. House owners with manicured lawns and regimented flower beds do not wish to see a large mangy mongrel waking up their garden path. In this

neighbourhood during daylight, Sirius was probably in more danger from the local dog wardens than he was from the aurors searching for him and his godson. That was why he had hid out the last two days, he just didn't think he could do the same again today.

It was a very tired Padfoot who was making his way as inconspicuously as possible down the street when he picked up something Sirius Black would have surely missed. The strength of the wards he just touched literally made the hair on the dog's back stand up. With all signs of fatigue instantly forgotten, Padfoot went off to investigate.

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Cornelius was making his way through the ministry en route back to his office when he was joined by Lucius, they spoke only about mundane matters until reaching their destination. The minister sat behind his large desk before giving his friend the bad news. "I'm sorry Lucius, it would appear the only thing the boy will be satisfied with is you going on trial under truth serum. Since you've done nothing wrong then we should be fine and able to put this whole mistake behind us. This will soon get the magical public back on our side."

This was Lucius Malfoy's worst fear, the last thing he was about to do was allow himself to be asked questions after taking veritaserum. He had to nip this idea in the bud immediately. "I'm sorry Cornelius but I can't agree to that, none of us are truly innocent and questions could be phrased in such a way as to see us both in trouble. The many gifts and campaign contributions I have given you could, under the right set of circumstances, be misconstrued as bribes. Of course, if you have registered all of them with the Wizengamot then neither of us has anything to fear."

Lucius took no delight in the expression of utter panic that crossed the incompetent fool's face, he had averted disaster once more but was running out of options. The Potter brat citing him and Fudge as the reasons he was leaving Britain would be disastrous for the Malfoy family. Perhaps it was time to take a vacation to their colonial mansion in Bolivia, it wasn't the centre of fashion or very chic but it was eminently more preferable to spending time in Azkaban. As boltholes go, it was at least very comfortable and the last place anyone would ever look for the Malfoy family.

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The big black dog was poking his head out from behind the wheely bins and was in total awe at what he was seeing in this muggle back garden. He'd focused on his godson immediately and his heart broke again for the brother he'd lost that Halloween . Seeing Harry Potter in the flesh, his resemblance to his father was a hundred times more pronounced than any photo. His mannerisms and the way he carried himself was pure James Potter.

He also couldn't miss that Remus was there and appeared to be teaching Harry and his friends defence, unfortunately there didn't seem to be a Weasley or a certain rat anywhere in the garden. Padfoot was frozen by the scene in front of him, it was the most beautiful thing he'd laid eyes on since before he was carted off to Azkaban. All he needed to do now was figure out how he was going to approach his godson. It was a massive risk but so was anything he did until he could catch the rat, anything worth having was also worth the risk. He'd seen his godson now, there was no way he could just walk away and leave him again.

Harry had been working at helping Luna again until Professor Lupin got the rest of them started. He was going to try Harry on the anti-dementor spell though he was warned it was very advanced magic.

After carefully explaining the emotions that fuelled the spell with the incantation and wand movement needed, Harry was ready to give it a shot. He managed a partial shield but felt tired after a few seconds, that wasn't going to offer much protection! Remus though, was delighted, he gave Harry some chocolate before explaining that next try he should try to use a happier memory to help power the spell.

Luna was carefully watching and thought she knew how she could help Harry for once.

Hermione found herself working with Hannah today, trying not to giggle at Susan's rather blatant attempt to get closer to Neville. The poor boy was totally oblivious to the girl's ploy though and spent all his time concentrating on his spells. It was funny watching Hannah and Susan swapping glances about the hopelessness of the situation.

Hannah then wondered if perhaps the smartest witch of their year could help them. "Hermione, how did you get Harry to notice you were interested in him?"

Hermione couldn't contain the giggle this time. "Well, after spending the night in his bed didn't work, I just kissed him!"

Hannah was gobsmacked, Gryffindors really did bravely charge ahead. "Oh I can't see that failing to work. Even the most clueless boy in the country couldn't fail to get the message after that!"

They were interrupted by Luna, "Hermione, Harry needs a really happy memory to cast this spell. Perhaps you could help him for a minute?"

Everyone stopped as all eyes were now on Hermione. This Hermione though had a ring on her finger that said she was one day going to become Mrs Potter, she could handle the attention. She slowly walked over to her betrothed and placed her hands on his cheeks before giving him a loving kiss. "Mmm, chocolate kisses! Don't let mum or dad see you eating that, it's not only dementors that can be scary. Did I tell you I bought a new green bikini for our holiday? It's the same colour as your eyes love so I couldn't resist it. Try casting that charm now."

The image Harry now had in his head wasn't exactly a memory, more something he was really looking forward to seeing. He didn't know if that would work but it was certainly a happy thought so he gave it a try. A golden white stag shot out of his wand and started prancing around on the grass, the positive energy radiating from the spectral animal had an effect on everyone in the garden.

Susan grabbed Neville by the forearm, "You ever need help with a spell like that, you give me a floocall!"

Remus had to practically pick his chin back up off the grass, the only thought going through his head was that prongs rides again. His thoughts were obviously focused on the marauders because he could swear he'd just seen another one.

It did Padfoot's old heart the world of good to see his godson so happy. When the lad's girlfriend walked over and shared such a loving kiss, well Sirius just discovered he could shed tears in his

canine form. Nothing in this world or the next could have prepared him for what happened then. A ghostly prongs was suddenly in the garden and walking directly toward him. For a person who'd been denied any positive feelings for so long, the power radiating off the patronus had the greatest effect on Sirius. He was momentarily transported to another place and time as the big black dog left his concealment and staggered out to greet his best friend. Here was his chance to say sorry for swapping secret keepers and not looking after his godson, being in Azkaban was no excuse. This had become a real red letter day for Sirius Black.

The red beam struck the dog mere seconds before it was bound tightly by ropes.

"Remus, what are you doing to that poor dog? It wasn't doing anything."

Remus was actually trembling with his attempts to control his temper, the wolf in him wanted to rip the dog to pieces for all the pain he'd caused him. "That's not a dog Harry, that's an animagus who also goes by the name of Sirius Black!"

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 14

The golden stag had disappeared the instant Remus's stunner hit the dog, now Harry's temper was flaring to match that of his professor's. "He's trying to take my new family away too. Not this time, I won't let anyone harm them."

Hermione's hand was placed gently on his shoulder, offering support but holding him back at the same time while her voice advised caution. "Harry, that's impossible. The wards would prevent it."

Her words were like a bucket of iced water on his flaming temper. If Hermione was trying to tell him something, it was time to listen. His betrothed continued to explain her thoughts, "The wards that protect the property won't let anything through that means any of us harm. Do you honestly think the goblins wouldn't have thought of animagus?"

Reus wasn't so easily convinced, "Why else would he be here?"

Hermione shook her head, "I have no idea, is there any way to change him back and ask him? Both you and Harry have questions that you need answers to, well here's your chance. There's enough wands here to make sure he doesn't escape, especially if he's tied up before you revive him. When you're finished questioning him, we can dump him on the ministry."

Even as angry as he was, Remus could see the sense in her words. He called on Dobby and asked the little guy to create a strong chair and chains to hold a prisoner, if Sirius made a move on Harry in Dobby's presence then there would only be one winner. Watching Harry's memory of the little guy dumping an enraged Lucius Malfoy onto his arse was compulsive viewing as far as the marauder was convinced.

Dan and Emma had also appeared to see what was going on, as Remus removed the ropes and changed the dog into a man, Dan headed into the house while Dobby restrained Sirius. Dan soon returned with a three iron and stood ready to brain the dark haired wizard, Remus could see Harry had found another protector.

Remus had quickly removed the wand Sirius must have stolen and couldn't see any way out of this for his former friend. Still, he'd got

out of Azkaban so it paid to be careful. "Ok, he's been disarmed and restrained. I'm about to revive him so everyone stay alert." Remus wasn't sure who looked scarier, Dobby or Dan? Both appeared ready to attack if Sirius as much as twitched.

Sirius awoke to find himself once more in human form, that didn't bother him too much. The chains and stares of utter loathing he could defiantly have done without. He managed to croak out 'Harry!' before Remus abruptly cut him off.

"Don't you dare even speak his name, you gave up that right twelve years ago. All we want is to find out why you betrayed James and Lily, then we'll be handing your sorry arse over to the aurors."

Sirius thought Remus was being very reasonable, had the positions been reversed he was sure there would have been curses flying before now. "Fair enough Remus, you'll find something in my pocket that will answer most of your questions."

Hermione moved forward to retrieve the object but Remus stopped her. "That seems too glib an answer. If you're trying to pull something here Sirius, I swear I'll kill you."

"Remus it's a picture of Harry, this lovely young lady here and the Weasley boy. The one that appeared on the front page of the Prophet."

Emma was moving before she finished talking. "I've got a copy of that inside, I started keeping a scrapbook. I'll be back in a minute."

It took her longer than that but she arrived back with the newly arrived Amelia Bones, the ex-auror had been quickly told what was happening. Amelia decided to let them proceed for now, she also had her wand out though in case it was needed.

Sirius didn't need to see the picture again, he knew every detail of it so well from many hours spent studying his own copy. "Look at the Weasley boy's pocket Remus, all your answers are there."

Emma gave an involuntary shudder, "You mean the rat?"

Remus now almost snatched the picture out of Emma's hand.

Hermione as usual attempted to explain. "Oh that's just Scabbers, Ron's pet. I already told him mum's terrified of rats so he doesn't bring the thing here." Once again all eyes were on Hermione, though this time they were looking for more information. "The rat used to belong to Percy, he had it for years before handing it over to Ron. I can't be more specific with times and Ron took Scabbers on holiday with him to Egypt."

Sirius nodded in understanding, "I'd bet the Black fortune that it was about twelve years ago, making Scabbers uncommonly long lived for an ordinary rat. Look carefully at the front paw Remus, notice the missing toe? That was the clincher for me, I watched as the little bastard cut off his own finger." This produced some gasps at that bloody deed from those listening, Sirius misunderstood and offered an apology. "I'm sorry for that ladies but the environment I have been residing in for the last twelve years wasn't exactly conducive to making me remember my manners while amongst polite company. I apologise unreservedly."

Dan was still gripping his favourite club but wondering why everything had to be so bloody different in the magical world. Even the escaped mass murderers weren't what he was expecting. This one looked and smelled like a demented vagabond yet spoke and acted more like a gentleman. That the man was also Harry's godfather just confused him even more. Why couldn't magical people do simple and straightforward, was that too much to ask?

Remus was staring at the proof in front of him but fighting against it, accepting this would mean he'd failed his friend for the last twelve years. "If Peter is still alive, why didn't that information come out at your trial?"

Amelia decided to provide the answer to that one. She didn't really want to give Harry another reason for leaving Britain but was appalled that this could have happen at all. "I may be able to help there. I just had a meeting with Fudge, he wanted my help in appeasing Harry. I told him Malfoy's head on a stick would work but the transcript of Sirius Black's trial would be a start. He said that was impossible because Sirius Black never had a trial."

Sirius actually growled, "I was so shocked that little shit Peter got the better of me I just stood there. Next thing I know I was waking up in Azkaban, not questioned, never seen a lawyer and definitely no trial."

When I saw in the Prophet that Pettigrew was close to Harry at Hogwarts, I just had to get out of that hellhole to protect him. Peter wasn't getting the last of the Potters while I still drew breath."

Dan had had enough, "When you're all quite finished, do you think you could take the time to explain what the hell is going on here. In English, please?"

Sirius may have been addressing everyone but his eyes never left Harry. "I was not the Potter's secret keeper and could never betray them, we thought we were being so clever in changing to Peter and not telling anyone. We didn't tell you Remus because everyone knew there was a spy amongst us, turns out the rat really was a rat after all. Your friend's rat Scabbers is really an animagus called Peter Pettigrew. After you defeated his master, he went into hiding. Peter knew that if the death eaters didn't kill him then Remus and me would. I thought I had him but he blasted a large hole in the street before escaping down the sewer as a rat. He didn't give a shit about the dozen muggles he killed doing it either, Peter doesn't give a shit about anyone except himself. Again, sorry for the language ladies."

Dan thought he had the gist of it now but wanted to make sure. "Are you saying you were innocent yet they threw you in prison and just left you there? No trial, No charges, not even questioned?"

"Yes sir, that sums it up nicely. Case closed and everyone then got on with their lives while I was left to rot!" Sirius once more focused on Harry. "Your father was like a brother to me Harry, and Remus will tell you we all adored Lily. I've loved you from the moment your father placed you in my arms on the night you were born. The proudest moment of my life was when I was asked to be your godfather, I then let you and them down and will never forgive myself. When Hagrid took you to Dumbledore that night I lost it and let my grief take over. I went seeking revenge when I should have been looking after you."

Harry looked toward Remus for confirmation. "I had three friends who all became animagi while still at Hogwarts, Sirius was a dog, Peter was a rat while your dad was exactly like your patronus, a stag. The only thing they found of Peter Pettigrew after his supposed murder was a finger, Scabbers has a missing toe. The Weasleys

have been looking after a death eater for over a decade, the man who betrayed your parents."

Emma was forced to ask a question she wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer to. Having Harry stay with them had made their home come alive, Emma hated the thought of him perhaps leaving to live with his godfather. "So, what happens now?"

Amelia was trying to work this out and not liking the answers she was coming up with. "In an ideal world, we catch Pettigrew. He stands trial and Sirius goes free but I just don't see that happening."

This upset Hermione's ingrained sense of fairplay and following the rules. "Why not, surely it should be easy to clear Mr Black's name?"

Amelia could understand where the girl was coming from. After all, that was the way things were supposed to work. "Hermione, Peter Pettigrew answering questions under truth serum could see careers ended and some high profile members of our society facing charges they couldn't dodge. I doubt he would even make it to trial, killed while trying to escape solves their problems but doesn't help Sirius. The new head of the DMLE will do anything Fudge says and we all know who he listens to. A great many people could have their lives destroyed by this, catching Peter Pettigrew is the easy bit."

Harry was staring at the man who was his godfather and claimed to love him. Judging by the warmth in his eyes and the fact he broke out of Azkaban to try to protect him, Harry was forced to concede Sirius Black was telling the truth. His godfather really did love him, Harry felt he had to say something. "Can we at least take the bloody chains off him? He's already been locked up twelve years for nothing!"

Remus shook his head as Dobby removed the chains, "Padfoot, you've been back in Harry's life less than an hour and already you're corrupting him." He pulled his friend out of the chair and into a hug. "Good to see you again you old dog, but you need a bath!"

Sirius hugged him back, there was so much they wanted to say to each other but banter came first. The serious stuff, especially what they were going to do to a certain rat, would come later. "What about you? I heard some of these young witches and wizards call you Professor Lupin. Since when did you become respectable?"

Sirius moved to talk to his godson. "Harry, I happen to know a certain someone has a birthday coming up. I have quite a few birthdays and Christmases to make up for, whatever you want is yours for the asking." Sirius noticed Hermione studying him carefully. "Please don't let the clothes fool you Miss, the Blacks are quite a wealthy family. Just because I can't go strolling down Diagon Alley with him doesn't mean I can't get Harry whatever he wants."

Hermione realised what the man was assuming, "Oh no Mr Black, I was just thinking I've never seen anyone more in need of a holiday than you are. Would you care to join us on our trip to France?"

Sirius cringed, "Hermione, please call me Sirius. Mr Black makes me sound so old!"

Dan realised there was a good chance they were about to pick up another stray but felt he had to be the voice of reason here. "Hermione dear, even if Mr Black here travelled with us as a dog, we would still need a passport and current vaccination certificate before the dog could get through customs."

Harry couldn't help but smile at his godfather's comment to his betrothed, the state he was currently in and all Sirius was worried about was feeling old? He also had a solution to the customs problem. "If he was under my dad's cloak it wouldn't matter what form he was in."

Hermione let out a little squeal at that suggestion, "Oh Harry, that's a brilliant idea. If we get stopped by customs, he could sit there and be invisible." His solution earned Harry a kiss on the cheek.

"Ahem, just when were you thinking of telling us you had a cloak that could make you invisible?" Dan asked.

"Oh we've been so busy I just forgot. It's in my room and I'll let you try it later."

The thought of him being able to become invisible totally erased from Dan's mind the objection he was about to raise.

Sirius was watching this and enjoying seeing Harry be so comfortable with these people. He couldn't help but let his

mischievous side out to play, it had been forced into hiding for so long. "Hermione, I couldn't quite hear what you said to my godson that had him casting the most powerful patronus I've ever seen. Perhaps you could tell us all?"

Hermione refused to blush, she was very proud of her betrothed. She wrapped her arms around him before answering. "I just told my Harry that I had bought a green bikini for our holidays, which start tomorrow!"

Harry kissed her forehead before lifting his arm and casting it again. Now that he knew his patronus looked like his dad, he really wanted to see it once more. The effect of the golden stag up close was remarkable, they could actually feel the love that Harry had used as his inspiration to cast the spell.

Emma wrapped her arms around her husband, "Don't worry dear, I bought one as well. I don't think it will have quite the same effect on you though!"

Luna looked at Susan holding tighter onto Neville's arm and couldn't help but wish Ron were here. "Is there any point of me saying that I bought one as well?"

Hannah was also looking at her best friend holding on to Neville's arm, she was also thinking that the rest of their summer was going to be very boring when this lot left for France. It was such a pity there wasn't room for another two to tag along, she was sure Susan would agree with that.

Harry was the first one who answered their friend. "Luna, I'm sure both you and Emma will look beautiful at the beach. I don't think I'll be looking anywhere else but at my Hermione though."

Sirius shook his head. "He's on the Quidditch team, betrothed to a beautiful young lady and already smoother with the girls than I ever was. What the hell am I supposed to teach him?"

Remus put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Sirius, you don't know the half of it!"

As the stag faded, Amelia was once more struck by how big a loss Harry Potter not going to Hogwarts would be for the school. "Harry, I

came here to tell you about the minister's visit. I didn't expect you to have company. I will say nothing about Sirius being here and will help anyway I can to clear an innocent man's name. I'm sure Susan and Hannah will do the same. Actually, after that visit from Fudge, I'm reconsidering my decision not to let Susan go to school abroad with you. Getting her away from the British ministry seems like a good idea at the moment."

Dan interrupted before Hermione could say anything. "I'm sorry girls, we would love to take you but there just isn't enough room and we leave in the morning."

Amelia could see she'd been misunderstood, "Oh no Dan, I couldn't impose like that. I just meant going to school outside Britain."

To see the girls' expressions turn from hope to crestfallen in the space of seconds was heartbreaking to watch, the two marauders quickly put their heads together as Remus gave Sirius the gist of the problem. Remus decided to offer the solution Sirius came up with since he knew everyone better. "There is an easy way to do this, we simply get a wizarding tent and pitch it beside the RV. Sirius will buy a fully equipped three bedroom one and either the adults or the kids could sleep there."

Dan couldn't keep the distaste from his voice as his inner snob made an increasingly rare appearance, "Camping?"

Remus was laughing at Dan's obvious reluctance, "A wizarding tent is nothing like muggle camping, some of them even have chandeliers inside! It will have as a minimum indoor plumbing and at least three bedrooms. You can get first pick of where you want to stay Dan."

Hermione was now bubbling with excitement at the thought of them all going, "With Dobby there it wouldn't be a problem to shrink anything and he will be doing all the cooking and cleaning anyway."

Dan looked towards his wife for her opinion, an opinion she quickly gave. "We wanted this holiday to be different, if you spend part of it exploring France in an RV, some of it staying in a wizarding tent and then ending up living in Harry's château, I would say that was pretty different! We've had the girls stay before so I'd have no problem with them coming with us. I suppose it's up to Amelia and if they can get

packed in time, bearing in mind we would be doing a bit of shopping over there."

Amelia could maybe have coped with just the two pair of eyes on her begging for a yes answer, with their four friends increasing that number to six she was done for. "I agree with Remus, Sirius is back for less than an hour and he's already creating mayhem! It's really good to see you again Sirius and sorry, I never knew you didn't have a trial. I trust you'll help take good care of these girls!"

A very happy Hannah then engulfed Amelia in a hug, the aunt was wondering where her niece was but didn't have to wonder long. A very happy Susan was kissing a stunned Neville. "Ok, I'll get these two home and have them pack, then have a few words with my niece!"

Susan was blushing like mad but didn't care, Neville certainly knew she was interested in him now.

Luna had a quiet word in Hermione's ear, "If I did that to Ron, do you think he would notice me?"

Hermione could only smile at the girl, "Oh I think he's noticed you, now all we have to do is get him interested in having a girlfriend. Neville appears to have got one now."

Emma thought their holiday was now turning into an expedition, and she loved it! "Amelia, when you bring the girls back, could you stay for dinner? Your last dinner invitation was interrupted by that git Dumbledore's appearance."

Sirius was immediately interested, "What happened?"

Remus answered first, "Your godson and his two friends had the imposter stunned and trussed-up in seconds. I'm telling you nothing more until you've had a bath and we burn those clothes!"

Amelia took both girls and promised to return later, Neville just about managed a small wave to his potential new girlfriend as she left. The poor boy had received such a shock to the system he may have progressed to being able to speak again by the time Susan returned.

-oOoOo-

Fudge had copies of the Daily Prophet from the last few weeks spread out on his desk. When one looked at the current situation like that, the results were not only predictable, they were irrefutable and also personally devastating for him. Here was the boy who had defeated you-know-who multiple times, slew a giant basilisk with a fabled sword and then took down the most powerful wizard in the country after the fool crashed their dinner party. Whether it was a pissing contest or a public popularity one, Cornelius Fudge was always going to lose to Harry Potter. When he looked at what was displayed in front of him Cornelius had to concede there should be no shame in that, any witch or wizard in the country would lose to the boy-who-lived. Why then was he, the minister of magic, being so confrontational against the boy?

The answer to his own question sent shivers of fear down his back, Lucius Malfoy. An apology over a genuine misunderstanding and some galleons to Hagrid in compensation would have seen the lad, perhaps not on his side but at least not his enemy. The massive stumbling block had always been Lucius.

That Lucius all but admitted to his guilt this morning was not lost on the minister but, with hindsight, it was a few of his other actions that really worried Cornelius. It was inviting Dolores out to the former Slytherin's mansion that should have seen his mental alarms sounding danger. Dolores was now the new head of the DMLE and Lucius appeared to be already grooming her to take over if this situation blew up in the current minister's face. Cornelius had no problems with Dolores succeeding him, it was the replacing bit that stuck in his craw. Cornelius decided to apply his usual form of problem solving to this mess and see what he came up with, he asked himself what would Lucius do in the same situation as him.

The image of the current minister's head on a silver salver immediately came to mind, that it was a head he faced every morning in the mirror in no way lessened the shock. In the image he even had an apple in his mouth as Cornelius Fudge was served up like a rare delicacy to appease a disgruntled magical population. With Dolores waiting in the wings, normal service would be resumed for Lucius in next to no time. The more he studied the problem, the more the obvious answer stared him in the face.

Could he do it? Would his most trusted lieutenant back him up or would she play her own game? If Dolores had switched sides then he was already done for. She knew that Cornelius intended for her to take over when he retired, it was time to find out if Dolores was prepared to wait that long.

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Sirius sat enjoying the best meal he could remember eating. The company was great, the food was fabulous and the offered wine was being left strictly alone for now. After twelve years without alcohol, Sirius reckoned he could wait until they reached France before renewing a friendship with that old acquaintance. He was also trying to ignore the sniggering every time one of the dinner guests glanced in his direction. If he didn't, he would probably burst out laughing himself.

Dobby had taken his written permission, and a drop of blood, to Gringotts so the elf could access the Black vaults and do some shopping. Dan had been knocked sideways when they erected the wizarding tent on the back lawn. Spacious en-suite bedrooms, a large, fully equipped kitchen and a separate dining area with a dining table that would seat everyone travelling was truly mind-blowing to the dentist. There wasn't enough room in their back garden to fit all this space, never mind how it all somehow squeezed into the small tent. Dobby had done a wonderful job and got Sirius everything he asked for, allowing the elf to choose some new clothes for the marauder to wear was perhaps a step too far.

Sirius was sitting down to dinner wearing mustard coloured trousers with a red and blue striped shirt. The purple ruffled frill down the centre of the shirt was the piece de resistance and the cause of all the sniggers. Sirius himself thought it was very funny and could see it being worn again as a joke. Saying so though would upset the elf that worshiped his godson, not something he was prepared to do. Anyone who could dump Lucius Malfoy on his arse while protecting Harry was all right in Sirius's book. The clothes were clean, new and fitted him perfectly, what else was there to complain about?

His new goal in life was to be the best godfather to Harry he could be. His godson appeared to have a good group of friends around him and the Grangers were top notch in his opinion. Amelia Bones making house calls to inform Harry what happened at a meeting she

had with the minister was something he couldn't quite get his head around yet. Sirius had a growing list of questions that he would hopefully be getting answers from Moony later. Remus was avoiding answering him about certain things as he didn't want an angry godfather seeking retribution and getting caught by the ministry. He'd promised to sit down, along with Dan and Emma, and answer all his questions once they were on the other side of the channel. Sirius could wait that long.

Harry now had two links to his parents and both were going on holiday with his new family and four friends. His previous summers may have been pretty horrible, bars on his bedroom window was a bit much for anyone to take, but this years appeared ready to make up for them all. The excitement around the table was palpable as everyone was anticipating what was to come. Hermione was using that fantastic memory of hers to clue the three newcomers in on what was in front of them, she knew their entire schedule and route off by heart. There were busy days interspaced with relaxing as they made the journey to Harry's chateau. No one had forgotten about the trip to Beauxbatons, or what that could mean for them. It was their summer holidays though and even Hermione wasn't going to be thinking about school during them, this year at least.

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Dolores had a decision to make, a life defining decision. Her life's ambition was to be minister for magic, an ambition she was now closer to realising than at any time in her life. The decision she was being forced to make here was whether to stick with Cornelius or switch to Lucius Malfoy, both could get her into the minister's office with only the time scale and conditions being different. Malfoy would promise her anything if she turned on Cornelius, she would become the next minister but soon fall under Malfoy's control.

If she stuck with Cornelius then the position would one day be hers, with no strings attached! What the minister was trying to pull here could still blow up in his face and cost Cornelius his position, the skill for her would be in carrying out his orders in such a way that the minister didn't take one Dolores Umbridge down with him.

Politically she might support a lot of Malfoy's opinions, that didn't mean she was going to hand the ministry over to him by being his puppet. When it came time for those beneath her to feel the full

power of the ministry, she wanted them to know it was Minister of Magic, Dolores Umbridge who was responsible for their misery. Those without the proper breeding and pedigree would soon discover there was no place for them in Britain. She disagreed with the death eaters in one major point. You didn't have to murder those unworthy of their wonderful wizarding society, just make their life so unbearable they would all soon leave.

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Dan loved driving this wonderful machine, trying to ignore the celebrations taking place behind him as he concentrated on driving on the wrong side of the road. They had breezed through both sets of customs, appearing nothing more than a family group travelling abroad on holiday. The custom officers in the British passport control point had barely glanced at their documents while the French had simply waved them through. Dan was having a quiet little chuckle to himself.

He was aware his reputation down the golf club was that of a rather staid and stuffy individual. Yet here he was, Dull Daniel the Dentist, smuggling one of the most wanted criminal in Britain over the channel into France. That the RV was also full of witches, wizards and the most amazing house elf would see many of the club members choking on their ultra conservative gin and tonics. Dan wasn't sure if the euphoria he was feeling was part of some mid-life crisis or even living a second childhood but he felt more alive than he had in years. This was so much better than buying a convertible sports car, hoping to impress the gullible but ultimately just appearing rather sad. A balding, middle-age man with a paunch would still be an overweight, follically challenged, middle-aged man, regardless of the expensive car he was driving. Dan thought this way was so much better, it also meant he didn't incur the wrath of both Granger girls. The senior Granger girl kissed his cheek before sliding into the passenger seat next to him. Emma's wide smile and the glint in her eye boded well for the rest of their holiday and left Dan wondering just how thick those walls were inside that magical tent.

A/N Thanks for reading.

Chapter 15

Lucius planned to pay a visit to Gringotts tomorrow, the portkey that would take them to the Malfoy property in Bolivia was of no use to him sitting in their vault. The head of the Malfoy family reckoned he wouldn't need it until the Potter spawn announced he was leaving Britain, after that it would be prudent to be prepared for a quick exit. As the new Malfoy house elf allowed their uninvited guests into the dining room, Lucius had a premonition that he was previously only partially correct. It would appear his time may be up and that portkey was now about as much use to him as a chocolate cauldron.

Their uninvited guests were the recently appointed head of the DMLE and a posse of eight aurors. Dolores played the situation by the numbers. "Good evening Mr Malfoy, I'm afraid that I'm here this evening on official ministry business. The minister has signed a search warrant of your property and has tasked me with seeing these orders carried out. Those orders also include you accompanying us back to the ministry where you will be questioned on the basilisk incident that occurred inside Hogwarts. I must ask you to surrender your wand, it will of course be returned when we establish your innocence."

Lucius had trouble believing what he was hearing. "Cornelius signed a warrant for my arrest? Has anyone checked him for influence of the Imperius Curse? Surely this is a bad joke Dolores?"

Dolores ignored Malfoy's attempts at familiarity, maintaining her 'I'm following my orders' front. "I'm sorry Mr Malfoy but the minister personally gave me my orders. My hands are tied here, the minister left me no leeway whatsoever."

The squad of aurors now had their wands out to ensure there were no misunderstandings about Lucius handing over his wand. Being arrested in your own dining room before dessert had been served was not a situation Lucius Malfoy wanted to voluntarily participate in, he was just all out of options and reluctantly handed his wand to Dolores.

That wasn't the end of his humiliation though as Dolores had more to say. "I'm really sorry about this Mr Malfoy, we need to search your person as well as your property."

Lucius could only stand, seething with anger as his extra wand and the knife in his boot were both discovered and confiscated. The senior auror suggested to his departmental head that they shackle their prisoner, he may have other concealed weapons that they had missed.

With the evidence of an extra wand and wicked looking knife, Dolores was reluctantly forced to agree with her officer. Externally she gave the appearance of a troubled individual, being forced by circumstances to do something she didn't want to. Inside she was doing a happy dance at how well tonight was going.

The head of the DMLE now turned her attention to the Malfoy's guest. "Mr Snape, I understand that Mr Malfoy has employed you to brew potions? Would you like to assure me there is nothing in your lab that currently breaks the law? Potions or ingredients wise? We have of course brought our own potions expert to thoroughly examine everything in the lab."

A worried Snape never even got a chance to answer the question, a now shackled Lucius beat him to it. "I have authorised nothing illegal to be brought into or be produced inside my home. Anything you find is there without my knowledge or approval."

Dolores next words had an almost medusa-like effect on Lucius, he felt as if his insides had just been turned to stone. "I'm really pleased and relieved to hear that Mr Malfoy. You've nothing to worry about sir, the minister has authorised the use of veritaserum to ensure we discover the truth of these matters. I think Mr Snape should also accompany us back to the ministry, please surrender your wand sir."

Even with the house now being searched, Dolores still had four aurors with her in the dining room. Severus didn't like those odds and surrendered his wand without comment.

This was an insult too far for the spoiled prince of the Malfoy dynasty. Having to watch while the great man who was his father was placed in manacles like a common thief had Draco griping his wand below the table, now his godfather was being arrested too! All this occurring at the centre of the Malfoy power base, their own dining room inside Malfoy Manor. Draco quickly lifted his wand and shouted out a diffindo curse at the nearest auror.

The severing charm sliced through the now turning auror's robes and lightly cut his shoulder, Draco never got to cast a second spell. Three stunners hit the stupid boy before he could move. Narcissa was trying to knock her son's arm down but the stunners blasted him back into his now overturning chair.

"It would appear we will be taking young Master Malfoy to the ministry as well."

Narcissa was terribly upset at her husband being arrested, Draco being arrested too had pushed that mood all the way to distraught. "Surely not Madam Umbridge, Draco was just upset that his father was being arrested. Surely you don't need to arrest my boy?"

The senior auror answered first. "Your son used magic while underage. That the spell was aimed at an auror makes this a very serious issue. I shall be pushing for his expulsion from Hogwarts and his wand to be snapped. We can't have witches and wizards firing curses at aurors every time something upsets them, our job is dangerous enough!" The blood was dripping from his fingertips as he said this while another auror carried out some field healing to close the wound. It may have stopped bleeding but this wound would trouble the auror for the rest of his career. His colleagues would be only too ready to remind him of the day a thirteen-year-old kid managed to hit him with a spell. He would never live this down.

Dolores was almost hoping that Narcissa would now try something, give her a clean sweep. Mrs Malfoy though was too much of a lady to involve herself in brawls with common aurors. Dolores was certain that there would be no sleep for the Malfoy lawyers tonight as they received the sharp end of her tongue to get her son and husband out of custody.

It really couldn't have gone much better for the head of the DMLE, if Cornelius pulled this off then she would be his number one supporter and eventual successor. If Malfoy managed to weasel his way out of this then Fudge was finished at the ministry. Dolores would play her 'following orders' card and could still end up as minister, albeit with Lucius whispering instructions in the background.

Either way she would emerge from this confrontation in a strong position and that made Dolores a happy witch.

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Bill had been searching for the right opportunity to have words with his mother for over a week now. Truth be told he wanted to get a handle on the situation himself and was now aware that most of what his sister had told him was obviously true. He didn't know the beautiful snowy owl that just arrived was going to provide his final scrap of proof needed and force him into action. Hedwig arrived with an envelope for Ron from Harry and Hermione, she was also carrying one to Ginny from Luna.

Ron was reading his own letter when Ginny passed over a juicy piece of gossip. "Luna says Neville and Susan are now going out together. Both of them and Hannah are in France with Harry, Hermione and Luna."

For some reason this news really pleased Ron. When he thought about it, Ron was forced to admit to himself that he didn't want Neville going out with Luna. He had just realised he didn't really want anyone going out with Luna and was attempting to work out what that meant when there was suddenly an event that captured everyone's complete attention.

Molly exploded with a squeal and grabbed something right out of her daughter's hands. "How dare they send things like that! I'll wring their necks for trying to corrupt my family with such filth. Luna doesn't have a mother so I supposed she can be excused for not knowing any better. It's now easy to see how that little muggle bitch entrapped Harry, the poor lad had no defence against that flaunting strumpet!"

There was a few shocked seconds of silence before the room erupted into mayhem with the entire family attempting to shout over one another. Ginny was standing toe to toe with her mother and trading insults before Bill fired off a noisemaker curse to restore some semblance of order. He addressed his question directly to his sister. "What did mum just snatch off you?"

"Luna sent me some pictures of them on holiday, I got to the one where they were on the beach and, well you all saw what happened."

Molly was unrepentant. "Disgusting, I will not have filth like this in my house!"

Bill managed to keep his cool. "Mum, this isn't your house and those aren't your pictures."

Arthur was also livid and fighting to control his temper. "Give those pictures over to Bill. He's travelled the world a lot more than any of us, I would like to hear his opinion on them before I say anything." The commanding tone of her husband's voice left Molly with no other option but to hand the offending photographs over to her eldest son. Her body language displayed indicated quite plainly that she expected Bill to agree with her opinion.

The eldest Weasley sibling glanced through the half a dozen pictures of the teens on holiday. They were happy, carefree and clearly having the time of their young lives. It was easy to see which one had upset his mother. Harry was standing on a beach with an arm around Hermione and Luna. He was wearing blue swimming shorts while both girls were clearly enjoying wearing their first bikinis. That these bikinis easily preserved the girls modesty surprised him, these were not the pieces of string that Bill had expected from his mother's loud outburst. These were very conservative swimwear, bought by a parent who knew their child was growing up but had no intention of letting that happen too fast. These wouldn't raise one eyebrow at any beach in Europe.

The problem here was his mother clearly thought these were scandalous and the young ladies in question should be tarred and feathered for having the audacity to go out in public wearing such things. It was time to face the music, or his mother's wrath.

"There is absolutely nothing wrong with the clothes these three young people are wearing to the beach. The swimwear would be considered normal on any beach I've ever been to."

Molly Weasley though wasn't for giving an inch. "How can that be considered normal? They're not wearing any clothes!"

Bill shook his head at his mother's antics. "They most certainly are! I understand they're holidaying in France? Most of the muggle beaches there permit the ladies to forego the wearing of tops and

most of the bottoms would be a fair bit skimpier than the ones Luna and Hermione are wearing."

Molly was flabbergasted at that, actually rendered speechless for a moment or two as Arthur took the pictures from Bill and returned them to Ginny. Molly wasn't finished though, not by a long shot. "If muggles live like that then we will have nothing more to do with them."

The entire family now looked toward Molly as if she had just sprouted horns and claimed to be in league with the devil. This was especially true of the twins, 'visiting French beaches' just shot straight to the top of their 'things to do when we're older' list.

Arthur's temper was in danger of getting away from him. "Molly, had anyone outside the Weasley family heard your earlier comment about Lord Potter's betrothed, we could have been in serious trouble. I don't know where these views are coming from but they are not shared by the rest of the family and have to stop. The Weasley's owe a debt to them we can never hope to repay. I cannot as head of family let you continue to berate and slander people who have done nothing but good for us."

Molly wasn't reading the danger signs coming from her husband and continued on regardless. "Nothing but good? She took Harry away from our Ginny, how is that good?"

Ginny wasn't for backing down either, this had to come to a head, one way or another. "Harry is my friend and it's you who seems determined to take that away from me. If you succeed, I will never speak to you again."

Bill interrupted before the entire situation got out of hand and words were said that couldn't be taken back. "Can you guys go for a walk, give me a chance to talk to mum? Might be better to give everyone a chance to cool down." When they all agreed and left shortly thereafter, Bill was determined to get this out in the open. His father's patience appeared to be at snapping point yet his mother seemed to be hell bent on pushing at this until it broke. Bill knew there could only be one winner in that argument.

"Do you want to tell me what the real problem is mum?"

Molly didn't even have to think about her answer. "I want Harry to be with Ginny. She loves him and they would be perfect together."

Bill was left shaking his head. "Ron wants his beloved Cannons to win the Quidditch Championship every year, doesn't mean it's going to happen though. You taught us that you can't have everything you wish for, so what's different here?"

"Bill, we were so close! Only this muggle bitch is standing in the way of Ginny's dreams."

"I don't know whose dreams these are but it appears to me that Harry is the one standing in the way of them."

"Young boys can be persuaded to change their minds!"

Bill was struggling with what he was hearing from his mother. "Didn't you just call Hermione some choice names about what she was doing to this boy yet now you expect Ginny to do the same?"

Molly harrumphed in disgust, why were the males of her family so stupid? "There are other ways to entice attention without a young lady having to take her clothes off and flaunt herself at a boy."

Bill had to take a deep breath for the next bit, it would appear Ginny's fears were well founded. "Mum, please tell me you're not considering giving that lad a potion to force him to like our Ginny?"

"What harm would it do?"

Bill took that as a yes and felt like screaming at her, he fought to stay calm while wanting to strangle the woman who gave birth to him. "Well, since he's a lord and already betrothed, Azkaban for starters. At the very least dad would expel you from the family. Hell, he may still do that anyway if you don't change your behaviour over this! You heard him, the Weasley family owe these two a life debt. For a member of our family to then even contemplate what you are is unforgivable. That's exactly what dad will be, unforgiving!" Bill understood it was more important than ever to get to the bottom of this. From his father's behaviour earlier, it would appear time, like his patience, was running out. "What exactly is your obsession with this young man? He's already saved Ginny from certain death and then made her and Ron wealthier than they ever thought possible."

"That money only made the problem worse!"

Bill couldn't make head nor tail of this statement so asked his mother to explain it.

"Ginny is the only female Weasley for generations and we're an old pureblood family. I was already dreading the offers before Harry went and made her wealthy too. That much gold will attract interest from everywhere. I promised myself I would see my daughter happy, that's a promise I intend to keep."

Bill still wasn't getting it. "Sorry mum, I'm lost here. Offers?"

Molly explained it as if Bill was two again. "Your sister is young, beautiful, now wealthy and with blood that's as pure as newly fallen snow. She's going to attract marriage contracts from everywhere. I want Ginny settled with a light family before any of those dark bastards can get a chance to lay their hands on her."

Bill now understood, he thought his mother was talking large piles of hippogriff shit but he understood. "Do you honestly think dad would ever allow something like that to happen?"

"Your father is a weak man Bill, people have been getting what they want from him his entire life. I even had to use a potion to get him interested in me. Unlike Ginny, there was never any chance I would have a queue of suitors lining up and offering contracts. My parents were just happy to take what I could get in the way of a husband. We've had a good marriage but your father has been passed over for promotion so many times at the ministry, now he's been sacked! It's just the way Arthur is but I refuse to let that ruin Ginny's life."

Bill's voice was now firm, almost a carbon copy of his father's head of house tone. "Ok mum, you are totally wrong about so many things there. Let's start with dad. He could have a wand pointed at his head and would still never sign one of those contracts for Ginny, unless that was exactly what she wanted. Dad has been passed over in the ministry, I'll give you that one. That's not because of any perceived weakness on dad's part, rather that he's honest and refuses to kiss anyone's arse. Two qualities guaranteed to impede your progress in that cesspool and, I'm glad to say, qualities he's passed on to his offspring."

Bill could see hearing his opinion of his father was having an effect on his mother, he was nowhere near finished yet. "It may have escaped your notice but dad wasn't exactly out of work for long before being snapped-up by Amelia Bones no less, he's now a Hogwarts professor!"

Bill reinforced his message. "I can also guarantee you none of her brothers will stand idle and watch Ginny being married off to someone she doesn't want to. Merlin's sake, Ron was ready to take on a basilisk with a broken wand to protect her, what more proof do you need?"

Molly was hearing the words but had generations of in-built preconditioning to fight against. "But Bill, she's at an age where betrothal contracts should be being considered. Harry and Hermione already have one in place and they're not even purebloods!"

Bill considered that for a second before answering. "I suspect that was to protect one or perhaps both of them. In general, those days are gone mum and I say good riddance too! When I marry, the girl may not be a pureblood, she may not even be magical. All that's required is that I love her and she returns those feelings, no contracts and no blood bullshit. Charlie feels the exact same. With your current attitude you could end up not only missing the weddings but losing out on seeing your grandchildren as well. That's assuming dad doesn't expel you from the family first!"

Bill felt he'd finally pierced his mother's thick hide, not seeing any grandchildren would kill her. He softened his tone for the next bit. "Ginny is going to be twelve on her birthday, she still has her whole life in front of her thanks to Harry. She also has enough gold to do whatever she wants with that life. Instead of celebrating those facts, you seem intent on destroying the very fabric of our family."

He gave that a moment to sink in as he got Ginny's pictures from where she'd left them, deciding not to use the one on the beach though. "You say that you've sworn to make sure Ginny's happy, this is what happy looks like." Bill placed the pictures in front of his mother, the six kids standing beside bicycles all had wide smiles on their faces. The same smiles were there as they stood in front of a large, shiny vehicle. "These are Ron and Ginny's friends, being young and happy, happy just being together to have fun."

His mother's guard was coming down, it was time to drop the bombshell. "Ginny brought the whole family to Egypt because she wanted to speak to me about her situation at home. Ginny's a very smart young girl and can see what's happening, she doesn't want to lose her mum. Ginny's certain that if you continue down this path, with your obsession over Lord Potter, then dad will cast you out the family. Having witnessed that scene today, I have to say I agree with her."

The tears had started running down Molly's cheeks as Bill pushed on relentlessly. "Please don't confuse the fact that Dad usually gives you your own way with him being weak. The only reason you get away with it is because he loves you very much. Your behaviour is now threatening his family though, and the Weasley name, dad is honour bound to react. It may break a lot of hearts, including his own and Ginny's, but he will do it!"

Molly was crying unashamedly now. "I just wanted our Ginny to be happy, it's all I've ever wanted for each of our children."

Watching your mother crying was not an easy thing to do but Bill knew the alternative would be a lot worse. "Mum, it's time you realised that what makes us happy is different for each of us, and may seem totally alien to you. Sitting in an office all day may appeal to Percy but it would seem like a prison sentence to either Charlie or me. Who dares to even guess what the twins will get up to when they're older. Ron and Ginny now have the resources to carve out whatever career they eventually choose for themselves. Marriage and families of their own may be in there somewhere but it will be in their own time."

Her eldest son was right, these views were totally alien to Molly Weasley. Bill continued to explain how the wider world worked. "Witches in our world are now not only allowed to live their own lives, they're demanding it. It's no longer all about finding a husband and settling down. Ginny has two parents and six older brothers who all love her very much. You have to believe me when I say no one will be taking advantage of Ginny Weasley."

Molly peered at her eldest son through tear laden eyes, the truth of his last statement was beyond refuting. "Have I really been that

stupid? There must be something I can do to save this? I can't just sit and watch everything I've ever cared about become lost to me."

"It's not too late mum, we all love you, especially dad!"

Molly decided on her old standby, "I'll make your father his favourite meal, that will be a start. Then I'll have a talk with Ginny."

Bill was smiling now as he offered his mother a hankie to dry her tears. "Talking to Ginny is a great idea but dad's favourite dinner will have to wait until you get back to the Burrow. You won't find any joints of pork on the market stalls here, it's against the local culture to eat any part of a pig."

Molly was about to rant about the stupidity of foreigners when her son's words came back to stop her. Just because this view was alien to her didn't mean it was wrong. "I saw some nice leg of lamb for sale, your father is quite partial to that as well. Can we get some mint for a sauce?"

With that, Bill thought they had a good chance of getting through this crisis as a complete family.

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Minerva McGonagall was being laughed at, this was not something she was used to or had any intention of experiencing again in the future. Safe to say that Minerva McGonagall was one unhappy witch. The Thomas and Bell parents were chuckling away as they read over the Hogwarts Muggle Studies Course, it was only Patricia Bell asking if this was a joke that brought the conversation back from joviality. Both Minerva and Amelia wished with all their hearts they could say it was indeed a prank and pull the real course out a drawer, that wasn't going to happen though.

Patricia had heard from her daughter how bad the course materials were, since Katie didn't take the course though she had thought there was more than a hint of exaggeration there. Hearing and seeing it first hand for herself was mortifying to the educator, not helped by her husband's continual laughter as he read more. Lucy Thomas appeared to be on the same wavelength, it would seem it was now time to earn their free holiday.

"Headmistress Bones, Professor McGonagall, since setting foot inside Hogwarts I have to say that I have been very impressed with your school." Patricia thought a compliment before delivering the blow might just ease the pain. She indicated the Muggle Studies books and coursework. "This, on the other hand, isn't worth the paper it's printed on. Whoever wrote this probably thinks Queen Victoria is still the reigning British monarch, all the information is at least a century out of date!"

Patricia had brought along a couple of books from her primary school and a 'How it works' volume from home.

The pop-up book of cars appeared to fascinate both witches. The colours, detail and ingenuity were staggering enough, far less taking the revolutionary subject matter into account. Minerva attempted to sound a note of caution. "These books are wonderful, without a doubt far better than the existing coursework. My worry would be that they would be beyond the financial means of all but our wealthiest students." When Patricia directed her to the price on the back of the how it works book, Minerva quickly did the monetary conversion in her head and all her doubts vanished. Anger and shame then fought for dominance with shame being the eventual winner. Anger that once again here was proof that Hogwarts was providing a sub-standard education, the shame came from knowing she was part of the process that allowed this to happen. It was undoubtedly time for change.

Amelia was already discussing with the two sets of parents what the aims of the Muggle Studies course should be and asking them for advice on the best way to achieve this. As the discussion continued, it became more and more obvious to Amelia that this course could only be taught by a teacher who had intimate and widespread knowledge of the muggle world. When Patricia then suggested having a muggle section of their library filled with muggle books, the suggestion was so blindingly obvious that it should have been done years ago. Lucy Thomas's idea that it also provide a range of muggle teen fiction was also a wonderful suggestion that would be implemented immediately. What better way was there to learn about a culture than to read stories written featuring its places and people? With the basilisk gold at Hogwarts' disposal, this wouldn't be a problem.

Amelia would have a private word with Minerva later about the possibility of having a muggle teaching this course. A rotation of seventh year prefects as classroom assistants would solve any problems where magic was required while letting those same seventh years learn the subject too. Amelia had to face facts here, what the students had been taught up to now was about as useful as a one legged man in an arse kicking contest.

The headmistress was watching Patricia and Lucy closely and would continue to do so as they stayed in Hogwarts for the next few days. Amelia wanted to see how they coped in a magical environment as an idea began to germinate. Have both of them teaching the new course part time, meaning they would each only have to stay in the castle a couple of nights per week. Both were fully trained educators with children already in the magical world. They could be paid the same salary they were currently earning for only working two days a week and they would get to see their children at Hogwarts! A talk with Minerva about this would be happening as soon as this meeting was over.

That would be the ideal solution to a very major problem, Amelia anticipated no trouble from the ministry over this. That one was the parent of Harry Potter's Quidditch teammate while the other's son shared a dorm with the boy would stop Fudge poking his nose in. Anything that helped entice the boy back to Hogwarts was always going to be given the nod of approval.

That Fudge actually arrested the Malfoys and Snape was a massive and unexpected bonus in their endeavour to have Harry here in September. With Lucius and Severus sentenced to Azkaban and Draco expelled, that was now a possibility,

Amelia had to concede that their trial was masterfully handled. Nothing was mentioned that could possibly reflect badly on Fudge or his ministry, nor did the phrase 'death eater' appear anywhere. Lucius admitting that his intention when engineering the release of the basilisk was to see all the mudbloods and half bloods dead. This was quite enough to see him spend the next two decades in Azkaban. Severus Snape admitted brewing illegal potions and earned himself three years in the same no-star hotel, it also cost him his mastery. Amelia's next letter to Susan would be a doozy.

The last letter she received from her niece had been four pages long and contained muggle photographs too. All the evidence pointed to the kids having a wonderful time together. Looking at the happy, smiling faces, Amelia couldn't help but think that Hogwarts would be a poorer place if this group wasn't all here come the first of September.

-oOoOo-

Harry was cycling through the beautiful French countryside with Hermione on his right and Luna on his left. The sun was shining and, as they were not in any hurry, they chatted away as the miles appeared to fly past. Dan and Emma were in front of them with Hannah, Neville and Susan bringing up the rear. The kids had gravitated toward forming the two trios and everyone was happy with this arrangement. Susan naturally wanted to be with her new boyfriend but Hannah was still her best friend and Luna was sharing a room with Hermione so hung out more with her and Harry.

There were also plenty of times they did things as a larger group so no one felt left out and they were all having a much better summer than they thought they would when boarding the train at Hogwarts. Dan had been so taken with the magical tent that all the adults slept there, leaving the kids in the RV. All of the youngsters were well aware of the trust they were being shown and no one had any intention of breaking it. The respective couples limited themselves to sharing a goodnight kiss before they all headed off for some much needed rest.

Their days were filled with activities of one type or another while their evenings consisted of sitting around the large table, having a late dinner and chatting about anything and everything. Listening while Remus and Sirius recounted stories from their time at Hogwarts was a bigger incentive to return to the castle than the constant updates Susan was getting from her aunt. That these same stories almost always included at least one of Harry's parents quickly made this the best part of the day for him.

Dan and Emma were no slouches with their stories either. Unusual patients and tales from their university days had everyone laughing and Hermione blushing. Her colour really reddened when they began reciting incidents from when she was younger. Muggles trying

to deal with accidental magic without knowing what it was could be laughed about now, at the time it was just pure scary.

Hannah, Susan and Luna also contributed while Harry and Neville sat there like sponges and absorbed everything. Sirius would always want to hear one of Harry's adventures from Hogwarts and, having all his friends there to stop him playing down his accomplishments only made things funnier for the marauders.

His godfather's favourite so far was how Harry found himself on the Gryffindor Quidditch team instead of being expelled. McGonagall's love of Quidditch was legendary and no one who knew her had any trouble believing she bought her new seeker a Nimbus Two Thousand. Remus disagreed with his fellow marauder. He thought Harry and Hermione getting caught leaving the astronomy tower after curfew when they were in first year was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. Granted, this was because that when Harry told Dan they'd been smuggling a dragon out the castle, Remus thought it was the best excuse he'd ever heard. Finding out that's actually what they were doing made it just too funny a tale for Remus to resist.

There would always be a part of the night where they would come up with the latest scheme to expose Pettigrew and get Sirius free. While this usually descended into farce with wilder and wilder ideas, everyone knew it was a subject that was being discussed seriously in the tent when the juniors headed off to the RV. When they had a plan worked out, everyone would be included and help to make it work.

The only other topic that merited serious discussion on this holiday was where they would all be going to school next year, that's what Harry, Hermione and Luna had been talking about for the last ten miles or so.

Amelia was certainly keeping her end of the bargain and making Hogwarts as attractive a proposition as she could. Her latest letter to Susan certainly put the castle high on their list of possible schools. Things inside Hogwarts now sounded so good, it was now going to be up to Beauxbatons to impress them.

Hermione's face was glowing from more than the exercise and the sunshine. The latest news from Hogwarts had her really excited.

"Muggles teaching muggle studies is a brilliant idea, I was originally going to take that course to get a wizarding viewpoint. Hannah and Susan telling me how bad it was changed my mind but I would want to take it now, see if opinions on muggles could be changed."

Luna was almost as excited. "Mr Weasley will be a brilliant professor and we all know how good Remus is. Sirius says his cousin is a great laugh and she has to be better than Snape at teaching potions!"

Hermione's pink cycling helmet bobbed up and down, nodding in agreement. "With Binns gone, I wouldn't need to keep nudging Harry and Ron awake in History of Magic either. Ancient Runes and Arithmancy sound challenging too. What do you think Harry?"

"Sorry Hermione, I just keep thinking of Malfoy and Snape in Azkaban. I know it's wrong to gloat but I can't help myself. No Draco spouting 'when my father hears of this' either. All the reasons we had for leaving Hogwarts appear to have been solved but I think we should still wait until we've seen what Beauxbatons has to offer before we make a final decision. We've added Susan, Hannah, Luna here and Ginny to our group of friends while getting a lot closer to Neville. I don't want to lose that and would like to see us all going to the same school. Whether that school is in France or Scotland should be something for us all to decide."

Luna quickly agreed with Harry's opinion. "I think the most important thing for me would be where my friends were going to school. Wherever that is, that's the school I want to go to."

Hermione could only smile at the girl who was quickly becoming her best female friend. "We want to go to the same school as you too Luna. This summer has been great and I'm just sorry Ron and Ginny aren't here, I hope they're having a good time in Egypt."

Dan called back that they would be stopping for lunch up ahead, then it was only another twelve miles to where Remus and Sirius would be setting up in tonight's campsite. A campsite that had a pool!

This was greeted with cheers, they were all ready for lunch but after another twelve miles on the bikes, that pool would be wonderful and very welcome.

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When Ginny heard the knock at her room door, she knew who it was before her mother entered. "Can I have a word with you Ginny? I want to apologise and bought you something to say how sorry I am."

Ginny took the parcel from her mother and found a green bikini similar to the ones Hermione and Luna were wearing in the picture. She had no idea where this was going and raised a questioning eyebrow to her mother.

"Bill told me why you brought us all to Egypt and for that I'm sorry. I know you and Ron would rather be on holiday with your friends. If you both want to go and spent time at Harry's house before seeing Beauxbatons then I think that would be the best for everyone."

Ginny was staring at the item in her hands and misread the situation. "If this is meant to make me compete with Hermione and Luna then it just won't work, Harry doesn't have eyes for anyone but Hermione."

"Ginny, Bill helped me pick this out. The idea is that you would be the same as your friends. All I want is for you to be happy, when I looked again at those pictures I had to admit they all appeared very happy. I want the same for you and Ron, nothing more. Bill pointed out that I have to let my children make their own way in life. It's really hard for me to do but the way I was acting, I was going to lose you all anyway."

Molly's eyes were now filling with tears. "Losing you would kill me, sitting in Dumbledore's office and thinking you were dead was the worse feeling in the world. I know I can be possessive but I think that time spent thinking I'd lost you made me even worse. I hurt you and again I'm sorry."

Ginny pounce into her mother's waiting arms as they began building bridges, "Can we really go to Harry's house, I need to write and ask him."

Molly smiled at her beautiful daughter. "I spoke to Ron before I came in here, the letter is already away. I've never seen him move so fast if there wasn't food or Quidditch concerned, do you think he's sweet on one of the girls that are there?"

Ginny's giggles were a magical sound for Molly, for too long all they had done was argue. That was not going to happen again, they probably would still argue but things would never be allowed to reach this state.

-oOoOo-

Millicent Bulstrode was also receiving a visit in her bedroom by her parents, she was also in a bit of a state but there was certainly no giggling involved. Her parents were accompanied by a ghost that her father clearly knew. It was also clear to Millie that she didn't really know her parents when she heard what her father had to say.

"Millicent, this is Lord Voldemort. He's doing our family a great honour by choosing you to merge with. You, Millicent Bulstrode will be the new Dark Lady!"

Millie didn't even need to think about it, there really was only one answer she could give.

A/N Thanks for reading

NOTE – I read over 'Can't have it both ways' recently and there were a few things that I wanted to fix. I have since edited the entire story and replaced all the chapters. The changes are more in the form of 'tweaks' and it's not an actual re-write, I just feel happier with it now. I intend to do the same for some of my earlier stories but it takes quite a while, especially when writing new chapters at the same time.

Robert.

Chapter 16

Frank was trying to reason with Sibyll but was having no success at all. That she was pregnant, hormonal and rapidly approaching hysterical didn't help the situation any either. "Sibyll, you know I have to do this. If Voldemort can find a new body, you, our baby and me are all as good as dead. I can save you and our baby, I have to do this so our child can have a future, I have no choice."

Sibyll was inconsolable, trying to speak through her sobs. "We always have a choice Frank, I don't want you to do this. I want our child to have the chance to know their father. I don't think I can do this alone. I'm not strong enough to do this without you Frank, I need your strength."

Frank wanted to take her in his arms and say everything would be ok, he daren't. This was something he had to do, holding her like he craved could change his mind from the course he'd set. Frank couldn't allow that to happen. "I don't want you to be alone love, write to that McGonagall woman. Tell her what we've done to rid their world of Voldemort. The magical people should then look after you and our baby, it's the least they can bloody do!" The determination Frank was expressing told Sibyll she wouldn't be able to change his mind. "All my life I've wanted a family and I won't let this sick bastard take it away from me now I'm so close. In the army I fought for Queen and country, this is no comparison. I'll happily give my life to protect those I love."

Sibyll then pounced on him, and he held her until she cried herself out. Frank then sat her gently on the sofa before kissing her goodbye and walking slowly out the room.

Sibyll could hardly breath, she waited on the noise that would signal the end of the man she'd come to love. A gunshot rang out and she crumpled off the sofa, curling up into the foetal position where she landed on the floor. Apparently she wasn't cried out because Sibyll was once more sobbing about how cruel life could be. One minute she had everything her heart desired, that gunshot abruptly signalled the end for the father of her unborn child.

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Millicent stared at her excited parents, both smirking like some village idiot. The grinning ghost was also creeping her out, this thing was looking at her as if she were a side of beef in the butcher's window. There really was only one answer she could give.

"You seriously want me to give up my body to this dead arsehole? Are you out of your tiny friggin' minds?"

Her father could see she was becoming upset and tried to play up the positive side of this arrangement. "Now Millicent, just think about this for a moment. You will be the new dark lady and our family will be treated like royalty. Surely that's worth a little sacrifice?" Graham Bulstrode had misread the situation though, Millicent was long past upset, had raced through angry and had by now almost reached absolutely livid.

"Why the hell would I want to be a dark lady? Harry Potter has kicked this loser's arse every time they've met, even when he was a baby! If you expect me to let that thing possess my body then you're crazier than this ghostly bastard!"

Graham couldn't believe how disrespectful his daughter was being, in front of the dark lord too! "Millicent Bulstrode, I am your father and head of house. I demand respect and obedience, youuuuu..." Graham Bulstrode's voice was dramatically rising in pitch, as his words somewhat abruptly became undecipherable. This was due entirely to his daughter's right foot connecting at great speed and force with his groin. Graham Bulstrode crumpled in slow motion onto the floor and curled into the foetal position, both hands now forming a belated protective shield over his injured area.

Millie was now screaming at the prostrate man. "How could you even think that would be ok? You're my parents, you're supposed to look out for your children. How could you possibly think this would be the best thing for me?"

Voldemort decided to verbally enter the fray, at least this girl had a bit of spirit in her. If he had his way, it would soon be a lot more. "You're looking at this all wrong girl. If we combine, I can make you the most powerful witch in the country. Surely you would like that? Power is truly a wondrous thing to possess."

If Millie wasn't going to take this shit from her father, there was no chance she was going to listen to it from this gormless ghoul. "If you are so powerful, how come you keep getting your arse kicked by a kid? I will never accept you coming anywhere near my body, now get out of my house!"

Voldemort was about to have the mother subdue this little bitch when he felt his last anchor disappear. Screaming promises of painful retribution on everyone he could think of, the self-proclaimed dark lord Voldemort slowly faded out of existence.

Glenda Bulstrode had her wand out, ready to restrain her daughter. Disobeying her father couldn't be tolerated, not in a pureblood home. In front of an important guest too! Glenda's arm slowly lowered as the scene before her played out. Her daughter had just floored her husband and chased away the dark lord. She looked such a powerful figure, standing over her father and glaring at the disappearing dark lord. Perhaps Millie didn't need to be possessed by an evil spirit to become the new dark lady?

On the off-chance that hypothesis might be correct, Glenda thought the wise choice would be to hold off on any disciplining. Who in their right mind upsets an up and coming dark lady?

She performed a levitation charm on her husband before speaking to Millie as if nothing had just happened. "Dinner may be a bit late tonight Millicent, I'll call for you when it's ready."

Millie didn't think she would be able to eat anytime soon, her intestines felt as if they were tied in knots and she wanted to vomit. She had been aware for years that her parents weren't the brightest candles out there but this had left her stunned, stupefied and wondering what the bloody hell to do next.

Millie had just watched you-know-who disappear right in front of her eyes, her immediate dilemma was who to tell? Any of her friends would run straight to their parents and Millie could be in serious trouble. Millie didn't think that she played any part in his possible demise but that didn't mean she wouldn't be blamed for it by his followers. The ministry was also out, who in their right mind would trust the minster?

That only left Hogwarts and one name stood out. This witch had publicly backed Potter in his battle with Snape and Dumbledore, both of whom were now no longer around! McGonagall may be the head of Gryffindor but she always played fair with all the students, she was also the only one Millie could think of who might actually be able to help her. That, and McGonagall would have access to Harry Potter. If the dark lord ever came back, only Harry Potter could save Millie. Her parents were clearly not up to the job.

Decision made, she sat down to write a desperate plea for help. Millie wrote everything that had happened down onto parchment and suddenly had another worry, what if McGonagall didn't believe a word of it? Millie couldn't really blame the Hogwarts professor, she'd lived it and still didn't believe it.

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The thought of Frank lying all alone in that other room got Sibyll moving. Frank had sacrificed everything for her, he deserved better than to be lying there as if abandoned. Entering the room and seeing the man she loved lying there dead broke her heart all over again, she was soon kneeling beside him. When lifting his head onto her lap, Sibyll made a discovery that rocked her world. What she'd assumed was a pool of blood proved to be the now familiar black gunk. This batch of black gunk though signalled the end of Voldemort. What really focused her attention was the total lack of blood. She could find no wound before noticing that Frank's chest was rising and falling. Her man was alive and her falling tears became those of relief.

She cradled his head lovingly in her lap while wiping off the residue of Riddle. "Oh Frank, you'll get to see the baby, our child!"

Sibyll's tears of joy dripped onto Frank's face, causing his eyelids to flutter.

It was a very surprised Frank who opened his eyes. "Sibyll? What happened?" While she struggled to answer, Frank had a revelation. "Riddle's gone! I can't feel him anymore, he's defiantly gone."

Sibyll was struggling to regain any semblance of composure. She had something that needed saying though and wasn't for holding

back. "Frank Bryce, you ever try and leave us again and I'll kill you myself!"

Frank felt that, in many ways, his life had only began after meeting Sibyll. He'd now apparently been granted an extension to that life, Frank fully intended to enjoy every second of it. "I have no intention of ever leaving your side again love. Riddle was fighting like mad for control of my body, trying to stop me pulling the trigger. When I thought of you, standing with our baby held in your arms, he didn't stand a chance. Thinking of you and our baby gave me the strength to do what I needed to do. After that though, I remember a terrible scream and nothing else until I woke and saw you."

"I heard the gun fire Frank, I wanted to die with you. I can't be left alone again, not after getting a glimpse of what my life could be, I just can't."

Frank could just make out the pistol lying on the floor. Best he could figure, he must have dropped it when Riddle left him. It probably went off after hitting the floor, he would search for a bullet hole later. Right now he had someone who needed him to take care of her.

"Let's get you up off the floor love, this can't be good for you or the little one. I'll make us both a nice cup of tea, our baby should be able to handle a little drop of brandy in it. Their mother has had quite the day."

Sibyll was soon sitting on the sofa, mug in one hand with her other clutching onto Frank's arm. He wasn't going anywhere without her today. "I think I should still write to Minerva about this. The magical world really needs to know he's gone for good. I would also feel a lot happier if I could get to see Poppy." A raised eyebrow from Frank had Sibyll explaining further. "Poppy Pomfrey is the Hogwarts healer, equivalent to one of your doctors. She could tell me if our little one is fine, even if they're a son or a daughter."

Frank thought that was a brilliant idea and quickly agreed, he just hoped his next suggestion was as well received. "Sibyll, this has been on my mind for a while. Having that creature in our heads meant that the time was never right before, but we're free now. You said earlier that you never want me to leave again, I feel exactly the same way about you. I want us to take the next step. Sibyll

Trelawney, would you do me the great honour of becoming my wife?"

Sibyll felt she'd been through every emotion known today, only to discover a new one for her. She'd long ago given up on the notion of ever being married and having children. Now it was beginning to look like Sibyll might just get her happy ever after. She could only smile and nod her head as the power of speech had temporarily left her. Here was something else she could put in her letter to Minerva. She, Sibyll Trelawney, was getting married and going to be a mother. Who could ever have foreseen that?

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Harry welcomed Hedwig back and quickly removed the note she was carrying, some bacon from his breakfast soon vanished into the hungry snowy owl. They'd been expecting letters in reply but not this.

"Ron says his parents have given permission for him and Ginny to join us at the Château, they'll be able to visit Beauxbatons with us after all."

This news was well received and Sirius got really excited. "If we expose the rat, the French Ministry can deal with the problem. I think it would be safer for me to have a trial here, rather than back home."

Hermione though, wasn't so sure. She voiced her concerns. "I agree with you about the trial Sirius, just about anywhere would be better than Britain at the moment. I think we have a problem though. Ron knows my mother is terrified of Scabbers and won't bring the rat anywhere near her, I think he'll leave Percy to look after him. If we hint for Ron to bring it along, the traitor might just smell a rat. Sorry, but I couldn't resist the bad pun."

The multiple groans were not all related to Hermione's bad joke. Sirius tried to be philosophical about the situation. "No worries, I've waited all this time so a few more weeks won't hurt. Will I have to hide though?"

Hermione wasn't finished with the bad news, she'd obviously been giving the situation a lot of thought. "I think we have another problem to consider. If we decide to attend Beauxbatons, Ron will start with new robes, books and probably a new broom." Hermione felt as if

she was gossiping about her friend behind his back, this was the main reason she hadn't mentioned this possibility before. Everyone agreed she was probably right but couldn't yet see her point, it was Harry who eventually got it.

"New school, new everything else. Why would he want to take that smelly old rat along? Scabbers would more likely be left at the Burrow!"

Neville had shared a dorm with Harry and Ron for two years and understood perfectly what his two friends had just said. "I'm sure he wouldn't bring that rat to France with him. If I had a cat or an owl, Trevor would be staying at home too! I certainly wouldn't be taking him to Beauxbatons if I was going there. Beauxbatons would be a fresh start for Ron, the rat would be left behind."

Sirius was quick on the uptake, "No, I won't let this decide what school you attend."

Harry was also quick to interrupt. "Sirius, it's a factor in our decision but only one of many. Both Hermione and I have been leaning toward returning to Hogwarts. It's going to be like a new school with much better teachers. Remus, Mr Weasley, your cousin, Susan's aunt as Headmistress. It also has no Dumbledore, Snape or Malfoy, one of the biggest magical libraries in Europe and our biggest friend, Hagrid. Beauxbatons is going to have to be pretty special to win us over."

Remus tried to be the practical one. "What do we tell Ron and Ginny?"

One glance between Harry and Hermione was enough for them to know they agreed on this. It was Harry who answered for both of them. "We can't tell them anything. As much as I hate the thought of lying to them, Ron is nearly as bad as Hagrid at keeping a secret."

Hermione agreed. "Ron couldn't treat his pet normally if he knew it was an animagus who got Harry's parents murdered. Ginny had to chase after him when he found out it was Snape who gave the secret to Voldemort. Like Harry, I hate the thought of lying to them but catching Pettigrew is more important."

Harry took her hand, he was talking to everybody but the message was for Hermione. "They'll be hurt but once that Weasley temper cools down, they'll realise we were right. I think having a couple of nice owls as presents for when we expose Pettigrew might be a good idea."

It was Luna who offered an opinion that all their friends agreed with. "I think you're doing the right thing here. If it was me who was being kept in the dark, I would be very angry before realising you couldn't really tell me. I also know I can't be anywhere near that rat without attacking it! Ron and Ginny will be the same. Do you think he'll take it back to Hogwarts with him?"

Harry was again quick to answer. "I'm pretty sure he would, if for no other reason than habit. I can't believe I've shared a dorm with that rat for two years."

Emma interrupted, "That still leaves us with the problem of Ron and Ginny meeting Sirius, how do we deal with that? I think it would put a strain on everyone if we all had to watch exactly what we said for the time they're here. Do we really want Sirius to spend the next couple of weeks as Padfoot?"

Luna had an idea for that too. "What if we told the truth? Just not all of it, the only bit we would need to hide is that Pettigrew is a rat animagus called Scabbers."

Harry liked that idea, "I'd certainly feel better if they weren't kept totally in the dark. My main worry was if he talked about it with Ginny, not realising he had to keep it secret from his pet rat."

Hermione was now thinking out loud. "What if we didn't refer to him as Sirius? Padfoot is out because the rat would know at once who we were talking about, Snuffles?"

Sirius's pretence outrage had them in stitches of laughter. "Snuffles? How can you call a fine figure of a wizard like me Snuffles?"

Alternative suggestions were offered in-between the bouts of laughter.

"Snookums?"

"Howler?"

"Flea-bag?"

"Trouble?"

"Lucky?"

"Tiny?"

"Blondie?"

"Goofy?"

When Luna offered 'Snowball' as a suggestion, Sirius was left with only one option. Capitulation. "Ok, Snuffles it is! And Remus, don't think I won't be paying you back for that flea-bag comment!"

Hannah wanted to be sure she had it right before putting her foot in it. "So, anytime we're referring to Sirius where anyone might overhear, we call him Snuffles?"

Harry was a lot happier now and couldn't wait to write back to Ron. There was still a problem though. "How are Ron and Ginny going to be able to find us? We're going by road and Ragnok said both Hermione and I will be able to see it, what do we tell them?"

"How about we meet them at Beauxbatons? That will be easier for them to get a portkey to, they then return with us in the RV."

Everyone liked Remus's idea and Harry would send Hedwig off with a note tonight, she would spend today resting on the perch Dobby had put in the room he shared with Neville.

They had one more stop-off tonight and then reach the Château sometime tomorrow afternoon, they may have to drive up and down a few times as it was magically hidden. Only a Potter, or in Hermione's case, his betrothed would be able to see it. They would then need to give permission for everyone else to enter. The visit to Beauxbatons would help decide what they did after that. They would be spending at least a week there, whatever happened.

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Minerva McGonagall thought she was reading the strangest letter she had ever been sent, that was until the one arrived from Sibyll Trelawney. That Sibyll's letter came through Hogwarts muggle post facility had the Deputy Headmistress even more confused until she read the unbelievable story Sibyll told. The memory of Harry fighting against a horcrux that night in the infirmary would stay with Minerva until her dying day, that Sibyll and a muggle both had to undergo that same agony filled her with dread. This feeling was tempered though by Sibyll's claims that the dark lord was no more, a claim seemingly corroborated by the letter from Miss Bulstrode. Minerva would need to talk to Amelia about this at once. Well, as soon as she recovered from the shock of discovering Sibyll Trelawney was getting married and having a baby.

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From the moment Harry granted Emma permission to see his house, the dentist was in love with it. Surrounded by vineyards and featuring an artificial lake, it appeared nearer a palace than a château to the beaming Emma. One glance at her husband was enough to answer the question of why they had yet to move toward their destination.

Dan was behind the wheel of the RV but was incapable of thought, far less action at the moment. That this 'house' was owned by the shy, unassuming boy who was joining their family simply blew his mind. How could Harry just accept this and not be affected? In stark contrast, a birthday cake for him and Neville with some simple gifts from his friends almost had the lad in tears. Harry Potter was an enigma Dan was looking forward to knowing better over the coming months and years.

Remus took over the driving as they headed up the gravel drive to the imposing entrance. The gates had obviously recognised the owner was onboard and had automatically opened to allowed them entrance. The grounds were immaculate and the reason for that was soon answered by the group of house elves, lined up on the wide steps that led to the entrance.

As they climbed out the RV, the head elf approached Harry and bowed deeply. She was dressed in a little red robe with the Potter family crest embroidered into the breast. Thankfully, she also spoke

in English. "Lord Potter has once more returned to his home. I is Polly and am very pleased to welcome you here?"

Emma was in awe of this place and spoke her thoughts out loud. "Harry, I may never want to leave here!"

"Mum, you haven't even seen the inside yet."

"Hermione, if it's half as good on the inside, my mind will already be made up."

After Polly had introduced them to the large staff of elves, they made their way inside to discover that it surpassed all their expectations. This didn't look like restoration to Emma, it was all the original features that had been lovingly cared for over the centuries.

Harry called for a nervous Dobby so he could introduce the little guy to the rest of the elves. "Polly, this is our good friend Dobby. He's been taking care of us since the beginning of summer and doing a brilliant job of it. I'd like for him to have a bit of a holiday himself but I know he would hate that. Please find something for him to do that makes him happy, he's a member of our family."

Polly looked the strange elf up and down, obviously not sure what to make of him. "Lord Potter, do you wish Dobby to wear the official robes of House Potter."

"That will be Dobby's choice Polly, and please call me Harry."

"Very well Lord Harry. Dobby, would you like a set of official Potter robes?"

Dobby was getting better with his emotions but still struggled to contain his tears at the thought of wearing something so fine. He was wearing an old set of Hogwarts robes he'd altered and copied the Potter family crest onto. The set Polly was wearing were simply the grandest thing he'd ever seen an elf wear. That these robes would also show his devotion to Harry Potter was too great a temptation for Dobby to resist. "Dobby would be honoured to wear House Potter robes."

Hermione was struggling with the grandeur of all this, 'house' seemed such an inappropriate description but would have to do for

now. Her parents though were practically going gaga, she was beginning to get embarrassed. "Mum, dad, behave yourselves."

Dan though was still beyond comprehension. "Hermione, your boyfriend has his own vineyards. Does he have his own label?"

It was Polly who answered. "Yes sir, the château has its own label. We haven't been able to sell any since Lord Harry's grandfather died so our storerooms are full to overflowing. We'll serve some with dinner tonight but I would suggest showing you to rooms so you can freshen up first. Would you like a tour of the house and grounds?"

Emma answered before anyone else got the chance. "Oh Polly, that would be wonderful. When I was a little girl, I once holidayed in France with my parents. We visited a stately home that wasn't near as splendid as this and it's always been my dream to stay in one. It would appear Harry here is about to make another Granger girl's dream come true."

Dan followed on as Polly led them all to rooms. He was thinking that his wish had been answered as well. All the stuff that had happened this summer had to be kept secret yet here was something he could casually let slip down his golf club. His daughter's boyfriend grew his own grapes and had his own wine label. Dan thought he would be safe with that one, there was no way Emma wasn't going to mention the château.

They started on this holiday hoping it would be different and a bit of an adventure. Boy, had they surpassed those ambitions. The company alone easily made this the best holiday the Grangers had ever taken. When you factored in the locations, the RV, magical tent, Dobby looking after them and now this! Dan was still lost for words. When Polly casually mentioned that they were passing the library, both Granger females were now glassy eyed with excitement too. Dan suddenly realised he might not get a chance to do his boasting down the golf club after all, the Grangers just might be moving to France.

Harry noticed something was troubling Luna so quickly asked her about it. "Oh it's nothing Harry. This is such a beautiful house. It's just I'll miss the closeness of us all sleeping in the RV. This has been the best holiday of my life because I've spent it with friends."

Harry had his arm around the little blonds' shoulder in a brotherly embrace. "Believe me Luna, I know exactly what you mean. Polly, do we have any rooms that are linked?"

"There are suits with nursery's attached, we could easily put beds in there to take the four young ladies."

"We will shortly be joined by a fifth and another boy, will that pose any problems?"

"Lord Harry, we have thirty two bedrooms, not counting the four nurseries. I think we can manage. The staff is all delighted to see people staying here again and are looking forward to meeting your every need."

She led the girls into a suite that had its own sitting room with two bedrooms off it. Three beds had been placed in the bigger bedroom and two in the other. All four girls were very happy with this arrangement and the sitting room would allow them to sit and chat long into the evening.

When Harry noticed a similar set-up for the boys only had one bed in each room, he was about to ask why when Polly anticipated his question.

"Lord Harry will of course be housed in the master suite."

"Polly, I think we should give that one to Dan and Emma."

"Lord Harry, only the master is allowed to sleep in the master suite. The room set aside for the Grangers is the best guest suite in the château, as befitting the parents of your betrothed."

Polly led them to the master suite. When she opened the doors, Harry found himself lost for words. He was thinking he could literally get lost in here when Hannah chipped in with a comment.

"Merlin Harry, you could play Quidditch in your bedroom!"

The rest of the group had followed on behind, all wanting to see Harry's room.

"Hannah Abbott, don't you dare give him any ideas. I can just picture him and Ron zooming about in here on brooms." Hermione slipped her hand into Harry's, offering her support as he dealt with more things that stopped him being 'just Harry'.

Polly led the group away to show the Grangers their room, Hermione kept hold of his hand and the marauders stayed with Harry. He had a question for them.

"Sirius, Remus, do you know if my mum ever visited this place? I was watching the excited look on Emma's face and trying to imagine my dad showing mum around the house."

Sirius had a lump in his throat at that image and tried to answer his godson as best he could. "I don't really know Harry. Your dad took her somewhere pretty special for her honeymoon. For some reason, they never told the rest of us where it was."

Remus confirmed what Sirius had just said. "I know it's hard to understand but the times were different then, we were at war. Your mum was married at eighteen, pregnant with you at nineteen before being murdered while still only twenty one."

"They would have been so proud of you Harry. I've only known you again for a few weeks and I couldn't be prouder of my godson."

Hermione was still holding his hand and made a suggestion. "Harry, Polly would know. Perhaps we should ask her?"

Polly was immediately by their side and answered Harry's question without having to be asked. "Lady Lily has indeed stayed in Potter Château. Yes, Madam Granger's reaction did remind Polly of her first view of the château. Your parents were married in September nineteen seventy nine and stayed here for nearly six weeks before heading back to Britain. Unfortunately, they never got time to return."

Nothing would get Harry to change rooms now but Hermione's next comment cemented that opinion.

"Harry, your mum must have been pregnant with you before she left here!"

There were tears in the boy's eyes, now he understood why this felt so right to him. His voice was barely above a whisper but Hermione, Sirius, Remus and Polly all heard him clearly. "Mum, dad, I've come home!"

Emma had opened the French doors and was now standing on the balcony off their bedroom. The wrought iron work of the railings was exquisite yet paled into insignificance when compared to the view. The elves had the grounds manicured to a degree she'd never seen anywhere else. A pair of arms slid around her waist from behind and she instinctively leaned back, resting her head on her husband's chest.

"I've pinched myself black and blue but it's all real Dan. Ever since the summer began, it's felt more like a fairy tale than anything else."

"Yeah, The Ragamuffin Prince has quite the ring to it!"

There was no laughter though, both parents now understood their lives had changed forever since Harry entered their lives. Emma turned around and held Dan, kissing him deeply.

"Love, we're going to get a tour of this place. Just save that for after, I promise not to drink too much wine at dinner."

As Emma snuggled in, she asked Dan a question. "Do you think Harry would let us live here? Even if the kids go back to Hogwarts, they'll be away almost nine months of the year. We could move our practice to France and live here."

"I think Harry would let you do whatever you wanted. Let's wait and see what they decide school wise first, then we can sit down and talk it over."

"Now there's the man I love, let's go see the rest of the house before I don't let you out the room."

It was with more than a hint of reluctance that Dan led his wife out to join everyone else.

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Albus Dumbledore had always claimed there were things worse than death, he now knew this to be true. Albus was not only being ignored, he'd been forgotten about. He didn't need his legilimency to know the guards thought of him as nothing more than an unwelcome chore.

All his gentle probes revealed was Harry Potter this and Harry Potter that, even Voldemort was hardly granted a passing thought. He, the grand manipulator, was now nothing more than a captured pawn in someone else's game. The ministry would wheel him out and convict him of whatever when it best suited their purpose. His resentment at this treatment was slowly festering into hate.

How dare they forget what he'd achieved, how dare they treat him as an ordinary criminal. He was Albus Dumbledore, he was extraordinary! Albus could cope with many things but public ridicule would be much preferable to being ignored. He'd tried to play within their rules, mostly. He'd resisted all the temptations that came with being the most powerful wizard in the country. Look what it had gotten him. He'd been stuck in this cell for week upon week and they didn't even have the decency to ask him any more questions since that first night!

Fawkes had deserted him and the elder wand may be gone but Albus Dumbledore was still a force to be reckoned with. If the magical society wouldn't treat him with the reverence that he deserved, then they would tremble at his name. Either way, he was through being ignored. Sometimes it was necessary to break something so it could be fixed properly. There may be some pain involved initially but it was all for the greater good.

A/N thanks for reading

Chapter 17

The RV's arrival was greeted enthusiastically by two redheads, Ron and Ginny had arrived first and were waving like crazy as the silver machine pulled up in front of Beauxbatons. The French Academy of Magic was undoubtedly housed in a beautiful building but it certainly wasn't receiving the reverence that it deserved from either set of newcomers.

Emma and Dan were so enthralled by Harry's château that Beauxbatons held nothing new for them. Remus had chosen to stay behind and look after the dog, he was now a Hogwarts professor and not really comfortable touring the competition.

The kids were all far too busy catching up with each other that a mere building stood no chance of gaining any notice. The Beauxbatons' Headmistress had actually to theatrically clear her throat before they eventually noticed her. Considering she was of a size that matched Hagrid, that really took some doing.

"Good afternoon everyone and welcome to Beauxbatons. My intention today is to provide a tour of our great school, then I have arranged for you to meet and chat with some of our current students. We have found that this is the best way for prospective students to get a proper feel of the school."

There was something about this woman that annoyed the hell out of Emma from the instant they meet. It had nothing to do with her great size or poor spoken English, more like the way she looked at Harry. It was as if he was some special accoutrement that the headmistress wanted to mount above her school entrance. Emma had no difficulty in imagining this witch having 'the school chosen by Harry Potter' printed on all the school's official stationary. The Granger parents had gradually learned just how famous Harry was in the magical world, having his picture on the front page of the newspapers helped. That was emphasised for both parents when he became betrothed to their daughter, it was front page news in the magical community. She asked the obvious question, in perfect French. "Excuse me Headmistress, do you get a lot of students transferring? I got the impression from Minerva McGonagall that this was an unusual occurrence."

The large witch wasn't phased in the slightest. "Oh forgive my manners, I haven't introduced myself. I am Olympe Maxime, Headmistress of the Beauxbatons Academy of Magic. You are?"

Emma handled the introductions for the group, noticing that her original question was ignored. There were small warning bells ringing for the dentist, one glance at her husband was enough to see he'd noticed it too. The kids were so excited about being reunited that it had skipped over them, even Hermione missed it. They may be becoming paranoid but both thought that was better than walking blindly into something. Emma and Dan would be keeping a close eye on what was going on.

Harry and both Weasleys were disappointed to discover there were no formally organised Quidditch matches at Beauxbatons, merely pick-up games at the weekend if enough students were interested. Hermione was in full interrogation mode now and not really liking the answers she was being supplied with. The French Academy appeared to place more emphasis on teaching proper manners and deportment than it did on learning to defend yourself properly. Madame Maxime's answer of 'that's what we have aurors for' left a bad impression with all of the prospective students. Ron and Harry immediately thought of Lockhart's apparent defence philosophy, looking good while you got the shit kicked out of you was the most important thing.

On entering the library, Hermione's mind was practically decided there and then, Harry had a bigger and better collection of books at the château. The Hogwarts they had attended for the last few years may have had many faults but they group were quickly discovering that the grass wasn't always greener. That Headmistress Bones had sorted most of the complaints they had with Hogwarts was tipping the scales heavily in Scotland's favour.

Defence was always going to be an important subject to this group, Hogwarts had Remus Lupin teaching it which was a big plus for the castle. When you factored in proper Quidditch, a world renowned library, Professor Weasley, no Snape and a host of other changes, the groups' minds were certainly pointing northwards rather than in a southerly direction.

Both Granger parents couldn't miss the signals the kids were sending out, they'd gotten to know them pretty well over the course

of the holiday. The headmistress surely couldn't be missing them either but she appeared unconcerned, this left them wondering what she had up her rather large sleeve. They didn't have long to wait.

Headmistress Maxime led them into the academy's dining chamber where there were half-a-dozen Beauxbatons students waiting on them.

Hermione wasn't alone in noticing that the six students were all female, and all a few years older than their group. It was obvious that they had been chosen because of the way they filled their uniforms, uniforms that were a lot more revealing of the female form than Hogwarts robes. There was no denying these were six very pretty girls.

Olympia thought it was going well as she handled the introductions to her students, two of the boys appeared ready to sign up on the spot. Unfortunately for the headmistress, Harry Potter wasn't one of them.

Harry had his wand out and was pushing his friends behind him before throwing up a shield charm Remus would have been proud of. "I don't know what you're playing at headmistress, but it stops now or we start throwing spells."

Hermione, Hannah and Luna were by his side with wands drawn as Susan and Ginny dragged the other two clearly beguiled boys away. The Beauxbatons students and their headmistress were totally caught unawares by these unexpected actions, all wisely decided that reaching for their wands would be a very bad idea. It was well reported that these students had disarmed Albus Dumbledore before he was arrested, they had no intention of facing that kind of force.

Hermione slotted right into their usual problem solving pattern of thinking out loud. "It's almost like Ron and Neville were affected by some air-borne potion Harry, surely the school wouldn't stoop to something as low as that?"

This sparked Luna off to offer a possible solution. "Perhaps not a potion Hermione, rather a person? That would mean at least one of these girls is a veela, a veela whose using her allure on the boys."

All wands were now trained on the girls as Harry almost barked an order at the headmistress. "I want an explanation, and I want it now!"

Olympia couldn't believe how quickly her ruse had disintegrated into a farce, she attempted to recover some semblance of order. There was no doubt in her mind these youngsters would open fire on her students, she couldn't allow that to happen. "Yes Miss Delacour is indeed a veela, she is also one of the top students at Beauxbatons Academy. She is just very excited to meet Harry Potter, this must have caused her to lose some control of her allure. To draw a wand on her for this reason is disgraceful."

Harry noticed the other girls glance toward a beautiful blond. He gave a courteous nod to the girl, though never lowered his wand. "Miss Delacour, I mean you no disrespect. I don't even know what a veela is and would certainly never hold being one against you. Madame Maxime, my mind was pretty much decided before this incident took place. I wouldn't like any of these young ladies assuming they'd failed you, or their school. There should be no blame associated to them for our decision. I think I can speak for all of us when I say we won't be attending Beauxbatons Academy of Magic in September."

Hermione knew what a veela was and could hardly contain her anger. She wasn't angry at the girl per say, more at the headmistress who'd clearly engineered the entire situation. Amelia Bones was desperate for them to attend Hogwarts but would never pull a stunt like this, she refused even to use Susan to try and influence them. "I agree Harry, I think we've seen and heard quite enough. Anyone disagree with the decision not to come here in September?"

Hermione didn't expect an answer, but she got one anyway.

"Hey Hermione, I think you need to lighten up. This school has some swell things going for it. Ow, Ginny stop slapping me. I was only trying to be polite."

Harry couldn't help but smile at the sound of another slap hitting the back of Ron's head.

Susan meanwhile was using methods on her boyfriend not available to Ginny. She knew how to overcome the effects of the veela allure, she simply kissed Neville until he couldn't think of anyone but her.

An encouraging glance from Hermione toward Luna gave the little blond the courage she needed. Her wand disappeared back up her sleeve as she marched up to Ron, took his face in both her hands and pulled him down for a kiss.

Hannah still had her wand out covering the situation while comically shaking her head. "Wish I'd thought of that, Luna's been hanging about way too much with you bloody Gryffindors." Her smile robbed the words of any malice as Dan and Emma led them from the dining chamber.

Both parents had quickly recognised this was another situation where the kids were in charge. They stood by, ready to offer any advice, but pleased they weren't needed. The kids had handled it wonderfully. They definitely agreed with the decision not to attend Beauxbatons.

The adults closed the doors after their group had gotten out of there and pointed everyone in the direction of the exit, it was time to get out of here.

A still dazed Ron couldn't take his eyes off the little blond who was leading him by the arm, she had a tight grip and was blushing like a Weasley. "Luna, why did you kiss me?"

It was Hermione who answered for her now embarrassed female friend, also her parents and Harry still had no idea just what went on in there. "A veela can emit an allure that will have men falling over themselves to please her. Susan kissing her boyfriend broke the allure, that's why Luna kissed you Ron."

She couldn't make it any plainer to Ron that Luna wanted to be his girlfriend without battering it into his head with a beater's bat, Hermione could only hope he didn't hurt Luna with a crass answer.

Ginny asked a question to give her brother's brain time to work before he opened his mouth. Like Hermione, she knew Ron had the ability to hurt Luna badly if he just blurted out the first thing that came into his head. "Why was Harry not affected?"

This set Ron off laughing. "Tough luck mate, best medicine ever and you get to miss out." Both he and Luna were now deep shades of red but Luna still held on to his arm, Ron appeared very happy with this development. He loved his holiday already, this was so much better than walking around creepy pyramids.

As soon as they left the building, Hermione grabbed Harry and applied her own form of treatment as a reward. She was so proud of him for his actions in there. Thus it was three grinning boys who made their way back to the RV, each with a young lady on their arm and no thoughts of vela on their minds.

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Molly and Arthur were sitting quietly, both had enjoyed their holiday but agreed it was good to be home. Her relationship with her family was slowly on the road to recovery but Molly needed to push it further. "Arthur, Ginny's going to be in France for her birthday. Could we have a big party for her once they come home? There are people I need to show proper Weasley hospitality to and this would be a good opportunity."

Arthur paused for a moment before answering. He thought Molly had turned the corner but needed to be sure. "Can I assume hospitality is all that will be on offer? Neither Lord Potter nor the Grangers need any relationship advice." He'd deliberately used Harry's title to impress on his wife the seriousness of what she was proposing.

"Arthur, I won't lie and say I wouldn't prefer the boy to be courting our Ginny because I obviously would. Bill though had a long chat with me and pointed out that it's not always what I want that counts. I let that blind me and caused our children to be hurt, that won't ever happen again. Harry has made his choice and all of our children who know them appear to think that's not something that's going to change. I need to and have accepted that. What I won't accept is that Ron and Ginny's best friends don't visit the Burrow because of me. That needs to change and I thought this would make a good first step."

"I think that's a great idea Molly. Once we hear how they got on at Beauxbatons, we may have some idea of when we could hold it.

Talk with Ron when they get back and he can do the inviting for us. I would add Hermione's parents too. They've spent the summer introducing the children to muggle culture, it would be nice to return the favour and let them see how a wizarding home runs."

From little acorns, majestic oak trees grow. With this one tiny step, Arthur began to believe his family were truly on the mend. He'd heard a muggle saying, may you live in interesting times. Arthur Weasley thought they could do with a bit of normality in their lives. These last few years had certainly been interesting, they were also bloody murder on his nerves.

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Ron thought they were pulling his leg when he was told that the bedrooms in the RV got bigger at the push of a button, only the six of them assuring him that it was true had him half-believing. He couldn't wait until they parked and he could see it for himself. Listening to some of their adventures as they crossed France had both Weasleys wishing they'd come with them.

Harry was then trying to prepare them both for what they would find when they got to the Château. "Guys, there's something important I need to tell you both."

Harry in serious mode had Ron and Ginny's undivided attention.

"We had someone else join us on holiday, smuggled him out the country actually. My godfather has travelled all over France with us."

Ginny wasn't sure if she'd picked him up right. "Your godfather? Isn't that Sirius Black?"

Harry's nod had Ron bolting to his feet, well except for Luna holding on to his arm. Hermione cut in before either of them could say anything bad about Sirius.

"He's innocent, never got a trial, the ministry just threw him in Azkaban and left him there to rot. He escaped to get reacquainted with his godson. He's staying with us at the chateau but this is obviously something we need to keep secret, we won't even be able to talk about it when we leave France."

Ron glanced around the RV and saw nothing but serious faces looking back at him, this was clearly no prank. Considering basilisks, horcruxes and headmasters trying to kidnap Harry from the Grangers, Ron really couldn't rule anything out. He also understood Harry meeting his godfather would be a massive event for his best friend, he trusted Harry and Hermione not to lead him wrong. "I take it we're going to get to meet him? What's he like?"

He got his answer from the little blond at his side. "Oh you'll love Snuffles!"

As he was listening to the explanations, Ron decided this was quickly becoming one of the strangest days of his life.

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Harry's chateau had both of the Weasleys gasping, Luna was once more on the ball though. "Don't worry about it, all our reactions were pretty much the same as yours. It's amazing how quickly you get used to it."

Remus had heard the RV approach and was waiting outdoors for their arriving. "Harry, there's a letter from Amelia here for you. It's marked urgent. How did it go today?"

"Disaster wouldn't be too strong a word to use. Is it a coincidence that this arrives now?"

Susan sprang to her guardian's defence. "Harry, you know Aunt Amelia would never try to pull crap like happened today?"

"Yeah Susan, I also know she wouldn't mark something urgent if it wasn't."

Lord Potter

There is an urgent family matter that requires your presence at Hogwarts as soon as you can possibly manage. With speed in mind, I have spelled this parchment to be a portkey that will bring your party directly to my office.

Hoping to see you soon

Madam Amelia Bones

Harry didn't know what to make of this, "Family business?"

Neville was nodding his head in understanding. "This is something that affects the Potter family, therefore the rest of us can't accompany you. Hermione is of course allowed, as are Dan and Emma."

Harry spotted the black dog peering around the door, to much sniggering he shouted on Snuffles. Only when the dog had ambled down did Harry speak to him. "Sirius, this is Ron and Ginny Weasley. I need to speak to you now."

Ginny watched in awe as the big dog transformed into wizarding Britain's most wanted man, being friends with Harry Potter was certainly never boring. Noticing that no one else appeared confused by this development, she quickly decided just to go with the flow. Knowing that it would also have her mother taking a heart attack with the mere thought of her actions, Ginny had a slight smile on her face when she stuck her hand out in greeting. "Pleased to meet you Mr Black."

"Ouch, you wound me young lady. My name is Sirius, Mr Black makes me sound too old. I'm pleased to meet any friends of my godson. "

Ron followed his sister's lead before Harry could ask what he needed to. "Sirius, I need some advice on this. Pureblood stuff still leaves me confused."

"Well, Neville's correct. Amelia stating that this is Potter family business excludes the rest of us. Knowing her, this will be correct and urgent. I don't know what happened at Beauxbatons today but Amelia Bones doesn't play games, you can trust her implicitly."

Harry just needed to hear his own opinion confirmed, Hermione was of course by his side. A nod was all it took for her to do the asking. "Mum, dad, you want to come with us to Hogwarts?"

The both immediately agreed before Susan asked a question. "Harry, I had a letter all written to Aunt Amelia, I was just waiting to

add what happened at Beauxbatons before sending it. Do you think you could take it for me? It will only take a moment to fetch it..."

Dobby appeared with the letter and the photographs she had set aside to include.

Harry couldn't hide his smile, Dobby was determined to make himself useful in a place full of elves, his knack of being able to anticipate their needs gave him the edge. "Sure Susan, anyone object to telling the new headmistress we'll be at Hogwarts in September?"

The wide grins that greeted this statement were his answer, Harry had something else to say before leaving though. "Luna, I intend to raise your treatment from your housemates with the headmistress. Should they attempt the same shit next year, they won't know what it them."

Ron had his arm protectively around her, there was no blushing this time as he spoke. It was more like a declaration of intent. "Anyone messing with my girlfriend will know exactly what hit them, me!"

Luna snuggled into his chest, her voice barely heard. "Thanks guys." Having friends was great and a boyfriend was even better.

The four travelling to Hogwarts touched the portkey before Harry activated it.

"Ok, I want to see how these bedrooms get bigger."

Ginny just couldn't resist. "Ronald Weasley, Luna's been your girlfriend for two minutes and you want to drag her off to a bedroom?"

This was greeted by gales of laughter as Ron proceeded to treat them to his goldfish impression. Sirius was impressed, "Oh I like this one Moony. Am I glad I'm not a professor at Hogwarts when this lot turn up."

Hannah had the closing word though. "Just wait until you meet her older twin brothers!"

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Frank could honestly say he'd not felt better since before he was medically discharged from the army. That woman Poppy was literally a miracle worker. She waved her stick over him a good few times and then he had to drink some really disgusting tasting medicine but the results were unbelievable. It had been so long since Frank had been shrapnel and pain free, he'd forgotten what it felt like. He'd walked around the beautiful lake last evening with Sibyll on his arm. Yes he was tired afterwards but they had then cuddled on the sofa and considered possible names for their daughter.

Discovering that both Sibyll and their baby were fine and unaffected by the possession was the best medicine Frank could imagine. He was now looking forward to getting married and the birth of their daughter more than he thought possible. They had been treated very well in the castle and all that had been asked of them was to tell the story to some lord. Sibyll apparently knew who this was and had quickly agreed, now Minerva was leading them to the headmistresses office so this meeting could take place. Frank thought he would be used to shocks by now but when the young lad was introduced as Lord Potter he realised he wasn't. He couldn't wait until he and Sibyll could get out of this castle and back to some normality.

-oOoOo-

The party of four from France arrived in the headmistresses' office to find both she and her deputy waiting on them. After exchanging greetings and pleasantries, Professor McGonagall left to fetch some people while the situation was explained to the four.

"Sorry for all the secrecy and making this a house Potter matter but, after you hear these stories, we will have to decide whether we go public with it or not. There's also someone who I think needs help, which is again why I didn't want everyone involved at the moment."

Amelia handled the introductions when Minerva appeared back, before everyone sat and listened to this odd couple's tale.

Hermione had begun by taking notes but relinquished that duty to her mother as the story progressed. She was on Harry's lap and holding him tight by the time they reached the part where Frank

went into the other room to shoot himself. Hermione had no problem imagining Harry doing something similar and wondered if Dumbledore had planned for an eventuality like that since Harry used to have that vile horcrux in his head. She was now silently crying tears of relief that Harry would never again have to face the monster that was Voldemort.

Harry was comforting Hermione which gave him time to get his brain in gear. This was wonderful news, he felt a weight lift off him he didn't even know was there. Saying that a prophecy was a load of shit was one thing, knowing he would not have to kill Voldemort again was something else. That a squib and a muggle finished off the all-powerful dark lord was poetic justice as far as Harry was concerned.

"I met the seventeen year old horcrux version of Voldemort a few months ago, and the spirit who was living out the back of Quirrell's head last year. I also had to fight the one that was behind my scar so I have a fair idea of what you two have gone through. That thing murdered my parents and has made multiple attempts on my life, house Potter owes you both a huge debt of gratitude. My only question here is what happens next?"

Frank didn't understand the question, he thought the answer was obvious. "Sibyll and I want to get married, then live our lives and raise our daughter away from magic. Riddle made it quite plain what he would do to me and my family, I understand he wasn't alone in holding those kind of views? I don't want my little girl raised in a world like that."

Amelia could see the misunderstanding here. "I think what Lord Potter is alluding to was do we tell anyone about this?"

Harry nodded in agreement. "Sir, my life hasn't been my own since the night that curse bounced off my forehead. I'm sure that's not something you would wish for your unborn daughter."

Sibyll quickly gave Frank the rundown on the boy-who-lived, he appeared horrified. "I want my daughter to be just a normal little girl. She's going to face enough problems because of the age of her parents, she doesn't need anything else hanging over her head."

None of those present had wanted to mention the age issue, Frank bringing it up allowed Harry to offer his help. "Sir, I am more than happy that the secret of how he met his end doesn't leave this room. We don't have to go public with this but can still tell certain people he's gone for good."

Amelia was just about to propose the very same thing so agreement was quickly reached. Harry could now make his offer of aid. "I can appreciate you wanting to live your lives in peace and would like to help. I would like you to accept my offer of a house in whatever part of the country you wish to live in, also a trust fund for your daughter to see her get a good start in life."

Frank's jaw was on the floor, good things like this just didn't happen to him. He glanced toward Sibyll, totally out of his depth. "Is this for real?"

She was also astonished at the offer but was able to reply truthfully. "The Potters are one of the oldest and richest wizarding families in Britain. Harry here is the last of his family, Voldemort saw to that. You, love have only met the very worst that wizarding society has to offer. Lord Potter's proposal is genuine and one I think we should quickly accept, it would safeguard our baby's future. Is there anywhere you always wanted to live love?"

Frank was now gazing at the woman he was going to marry as all his dreams appeared to be coming true at once. "I always dreamed of a cottage by the sea in Somerset or Devon, what about you love?"

"I think that sounds wonderful."

Harry jumped right in. "Good, I'll have the goblins begin searching for the perfect house at once. Ragnok will need to know the full story too, if for no other reason than to destroy the body of the goblin you shot. I suspect he'll wish to reward you as well, please graciously accept. Goblins don't take to kindly to their gifts being refused. Again I fear you've only met the wrong sort. I intend to buy the Riddle and Gaunt properties and have them raised to the ground, I want no trace of him left on the planet."

It was a dazed Frank and Sibyll who made their way back to the Hogwarts guest quarters they were staying in at the moment,

promises of house details and pictures ringing in their ears. Amelia had also promised them a portkey to Hogwarts so they could have access to Poppy for when the baby was due. Both were too long in the tooth to believe in happy ever after but this came a lot closer to that than either ever thought they would possibly see.

Back in the office Emma had both of them engulfed in a tight hug. "He's really gone, that madman will never threaten my family again."

Dan was looking at it from a different angle. "Harry, that was a wonderful thing you just did for that couple. You literally helped them make their dreams come true."

"Dan, all I want is to grow up with Hermione and lead as normal a life as possible. Thanks to those two, that dream of mine is a lot closer. It might have been nice to have someone take the spotlight off the boy-who-lived but I wouldn't wish that on anyone. Headmistress, are we done with the surprises for the day?"

"I'm afraid not Harry, remember I told you there was a request for help? When Frank was contemplating shooting himself, the spirit of Voldemort was at the Bulstrodes. Millicent's parents were trying to convince her to allow the spirit to take control of her body and become the dark lady, naturally she strongly objected. Only the timing saved her from a fate worse than death. The girl is now terrified that she will be blamed for his demise and also worried at what her parents will come up with next."

Emma was so angry she couldn't speak, it was left to Dan to say the words for her. "What kind of sick parents could do that to a child? Can I assume you both know her?"

Harry thought of the large girl who he had to pull off Hermione at that idiot Lockhart's farce of a duelling club. "The last time we had any dealings with Millicent, she had Hermione in a head lock!"

The Granger parents got to see another side of Harry. A few minutes ago he just gave away a small fortune of a new house and a trust fund to two strangers. Now he was digging his heels in because this girl had hurt Hermione. This belligerence was the first sign to the Grangers that Harry was in fact only thirteen. Hurting Hermione was unforgivable in his book. They didn't know Harry had another reason, forbye her treatment of Hermione.

The girl in question thought she understood this and attempted to placate her betrothed. "Harry, it was Lockhart's lesson that got out of control that night. What her parents tried to do to her was barbaric. We have to help if we can."

Harry gently moved Hermione off his knee before getting up and walking around the office. Hermione held her hand up to stop her mother interrupting, Harry needed the time to think. His fists were clenched and by his side as he eventually asked a question.

"What would happen if it became known that Voldemort went to the Bulstrodes for help and they refused, causing his demise?"

There was a sharp intake of breath from the three witches inside the office, Amelia managed to answer first. "Harry, they probably wouldn't last the summer out. The other death eaters still at large would murder them."

Harry nodded his head as if he'd come to the same conclusion. Hermione caught his attention as she spoke softly to him. "Harry, that would be wrong."

Anyone else would have had the face snapped off them but this was Hermione, Harry tried to explain his reasoning. "So is throwing someone in Azkaban without a trial, so is leaving a baby on a doorstep, so is using a veela to try and get me to attend a certain school. He didn't turn up there randomly Hermione, Voldemort would only have went to the Bulstrodes if they were death eaters. Death eaters who avoided justice the last time, why the hell should I help them avoid it again? Unless it becomes public knowledge that Voldemort is dead, nothing is going to change in Britain. I don't want Frank or Sibyll involved because they were two innocent people, just in the wrong place at the wrong time, the Bulstrodes aren't. They were going to give up their daughter so Voldemort could return, isn't that a wrong that deserves to be punished?"

This was met by stunned silence, allowing Harry to continue uninterrupted. "Telling our friends about Voldemort changes nothing. Britain will still be the bigoted shithole it is at the moment, where blood purity matters much more than ability. We've had to listen to Malfoy, Parkinson and Bulstrode boasting they were better than us

simply because of who their parents are. Without exposing that Voldemort has been banished for good, that opinion's never going to change. Just because Bulstrode chose not to be Voldemort's new body doesn't make her innocent or one of the good guys, it just means she's smarter than we thought she was. Do you think any of them would help us if we were in trouble? They would be too busy organizing the party to celebrate our demise."

Harry could see he was getting his point across. Yes Millicent Bulstrode had hurt Hermione but this was far bigger than that. It was time to push on. "We haven't really had time to discuss this as a family yet but I'm pretty sure the four of us are finished with living in Britain."

He glanced toward the Grangers for confirmation, Dan was the one who gave him it.

"We were waiting until after the visit to Beauxbatons to ask if we could live in the chateau. Even if you attend Hogwarts, you are both gone from September until the middle of June. We want to move our practice to France and live there."

Harry smiled and nodded. "That is my home where I now intend to live, I would love you to stay there too. Hermione?"

She walked over and wrapped him in her arms. "I love you Harry, wherever you are is good enough for me. If that happens to be a fabulous French chateau where mum and dad are living too, I'm not going to complain. I'm also sorry I doubted you over Millicent and think you're right. Frank and Sibyll fought Voldemort with everything that they had, it was merely self-preservation that would have prompted Millicent to refuse her parents. Had she been asked to help get someone else possessed, we both know her answer would probably have been different."

Harry gave her a quick peck on the cheek before handing Susan's letter to Amelia. "I wanted to wait and see what this was all about before informing you of our decision. Susan didn't have time to write the last bit in her letter, since it just happened today. We're all attending Hogwarts come September, though we'll be moving permanently to France to live. Since you've both had more time to consider the Bulstrode situation, I would like to hear your ideas."

Minerva though was still focused on an earlier part of Harry's conversation. "Olympia tried to use a veela to get you to attend Beauxbatons?"

Hermione actually growled her answer. "We left that school with our wands in our hands. If one of them had reached for their wand, it would have got ugly. So would the veela, with a couple of stinging hexes to her face."

Amelia had thought Harry could possibly take the Bulstrode girl under his family protection, she now realised that would never work. They were going to have to become creative.

-oOoOo-

Glenda Bulstrode opened her front door to find two children standing there. That she recognised them immediately was hardly surprising, both had been featured heavily in the Prophet all summer.

"Mrs Bulstrode? I'm Harry Potter and this is my betrothed, Hermione Granger. Could we come in for a moment?"

Glenda found herself leading them into the family room and introducing them to her husband. His shocked expression probably matched her own, neither realised it was about to get a whole lot worse. Millicent slinked her way into the room and stood against the wall.

Harry let them sweat for a moment before telling them why they were here. "Mr and Mrs Bulstrode, Millicent. We came personally to thank you for getting rid of Voldemort. Actually, I was getting fed up of kicking his arse and am really pleased you finally finished him off. I intend to recommend to the ministry that you be publicly thanked for this great service to the British wizarding community."

Graham Bulstrode felt sick until a glaringly obvious solution presented itself. "Why I'm afraid Mr Potter that I can't let you do that. Certain associates of mine wouldn't take too kindly to that news. You really were a foolish Gryffindor to come marching into a strange house without any support. The Bulstrodes will soon be known, in certain exclusive circles of course, as the people who killed the boy who lived. George, you want a piece of this?"

A rather large gentleman appeared with his wand already in hand and pointed at both youngsters, he had obviously disillusioned himself when the door had been knocked. Standing back against a wall and not moving meant that both kids had missed him completely. Graham and Glenda now had their wands out and covering the young couple too.

Millicent was by any standards a large girl but she was surprisingly quick for her size. George Goyle was certainly surprised when the cast-iron frying pan she had hidden behind her back connected with speed, and considerable force, against the side of his head.

The resounding thunk, combining with George suddenly kissing the floor, saw the other wand holding Bulstrodes distracted. This was enough of an opening for Harry and Hermione, their wands shot into their hands almost as quick as the stunners left them. Both had targeted Graham Bulstrode though and Glenda found herself facing two wands while trying to decide what to do. Glenda was again distracted as the front door was blown open, she also could have sworn that little bushy haired girl was now sporting pink hair. The witch wasn't worrying about anything once Millicent's frying pan connected with her head.

The entire incident had taken seconds. Millie now stood there, frying pan raised and ready for battle, as Granger turned into an older girl who had shocking pink hair. A woman wearing a monocle had burst into the room, wand at the ready and also looking for trouble. She immediately took control of the situation.

"Shack, Tonks, sweep the house and make sure there are no other surprises before we invite our guests in." The polyjuiced auror and his young partner swept through the house, reporting it empty. Only then did Amelia call for her deputy to lead the others in.

Millie was delighted to see Professor McGonagall but confused by the appearance of another set of Potter and Granger. There were also accompanied by an older couple, the woman could only be Granger's mother. She threateningly raised the frying pan. "Someone like to tell me what's going on here? I'm not afraid to use this."

"Oh good, I like my bacon crispy. How's your summer been Bulstrode?"

"What's it got to do with you Potter?"

"Well, we're here because you asked Professor McGonagall for help. If you've got everything under control, we can leave and continue having a brilliant holiday. I am curious though, why the frying pan?"

"Bastards took my wand. This fat lump is Goyle's father, my loving parents thought it was time to marry me off. Possessed by Voldemort or married to Greg Goyle, now there are some shitty life choices for you. I would rather run away, which is why they took my wand."

Tonks spoke in praise of the girl. "The big guy was disillusioned when we entered, they had us cold until the girl saved our arses. Doesn't this complicate the plan?"

Shack was shaking Harry's head, enjoying having hair until the potion wore off. "I don't think so. He had his wand out with the intention of killing two kids, I say we just have him wake up in a cell with no memory of coming here. Pour a bottle of firewhiskey down his throat for effect. Tonks is right though, the girl's actions saved our bacon. Is there any way we can help her out of this?"

"Somebody needs to tell me what the hell is going on!" Millicent's voice had risen quite a bit by the time she reached the end of her sentence

Hermione though, was very cool as she gave the large girl her answer. "Oh Miss Bulstrode, your parents were caught red-handed attempting to perform a ritual to resurrect Voldemort. Unfortunately, the attempt backfired and he's now gone forever. They will admit to that or we publish the truth."

Millie's voice was a lot quieter as she asked the next question. "What about me?"

It had been hard to discuss this issue because none of them had known what would happen inside the house, Millicent though had clearly made her choice. Amelia gave the girl some of the better options they had discussed earlier. "I don't really think going back to

Hogwarts and Slytherin is an option for you now. Whichever way this develops, you are going to be hit with some degree of notoriety. Mr Potter has offered to fund your schooling at the establishment of your choice, I highly recommend you accept his very generous offer. Do you have any family or friends that you could spend the rest of the summer with?"

Millie lowered the frying pan and shook her head. There were tears in her eyes as she recognised the appearance of hope for the first time since the Voldemort incident.

Amelia knew Harry couldn't take the girl in, due to his rather infamous houseguest. She was about to offer Millicent a room at Hogwarts when Minerva spoke up.

Minerva had regretted her decision to let Albus leave that baby on the doorstep from the moment she arrived back in Hogwarts that fateful night. Here was another child being ripped from her family by the actions of that monster Voldemort, Minerva couldn't walk away again. "Miss Bulstrode, you showed great bravery not only here, but in writing to me. I would like to offer you any help you need in choosing a new school and a place to stay during the holidays. We can make this arrangement as formal or informal as you like, I doubt your parents will be getting out of Azkaban before you turn seventeen."

The large girl broke down in sobs of relief. Minerva led her away to pack anything she needed as Tonks and Shack bound their prisoners, ready to bring them around and see if they took the offer. It didn't really matter to him, the death eaters were going down either way.

Harry and the three Grangers took their leave of Amelia, promising to see her when they returned from France to begin their withdrawal from Britain. The portkey took them back home.

-oOoOo-

Dolores was feeling quite pleased with herself. The headline that her department had foiled an attempted return by you-know-who made very pleasing reading. That the two aurors in question had been working on orders of her predecessor was conveniently overlooked. The final demise of the dark lord had even pushed the news that the

Potter brat would be attending Hogwarts onto page two. That he was going to be living in France from now on barely got a mention. Yes, today's Prophet was a high point. The report sitting on her desk meant that tomorrow was going to be an entirely different story.

Albus Dumbledore had escaped ministry custody and could be anywhere by now. Combined with Sirius Black still being on the loose, things could turn ugly for the ministry very quickly. She already had a plan in place to destroy Dumbledore's reputation, trying to kidnap the boy who lived in front of irreproachable witnesses was not something the old wizard could recover from.

That both these wanted criminals were apparently focused on the Potter boy meant she needed measures in place to cover her arse should the worst happen. Since the dementors were already enraged that Sirius Black had escaped, she intended to issue orders that both wizards should be kissed on sight. Considering that Hogwarts would undoubtedly attract both escapees, the ministry would use dementors to guard the school. Purely for the children's safety of course.

A/N Thanks for reading

My next post will be Chapter 11 of 'No Hurry at All'

Chapter 18

Harry hated having to leave Sirius in France. On an intellectual level he understood perfectly why it had to be this way, didn't make it any easier or mean he had to like it though. Not only was he leaving behind his godfather, Harry was leaving the place that had so quickly become his home. This was no welcome escape from the Dursleys after a hellish summer, Harry was seriously considering staying here and hiring tutors. With Sirius currently living here and still being a wanted man and Remus being Hogwarts bound, Hermione had managed to talk Harry out of it.

Sirius attempted to lift his godson's spirits as he walked with his arm around Harry's shoulders toward the RV. "Cheer up Harry, you'll all be heading back to Hogwarts next week anyway. Dan and Emma will soon be back to keep me company and it'll be Christmas before you know it. We'll all be together again then."

No mention was made of Peter Pettigrew while Ron and Ginny were there but everyone else hoped Sirius would be standing in Kings Cross station to greet them off the Hogwarts express come December. Sirius being a free man was top of Harry Potter's Christmas wish list.

The sun had barely risen as the RV was pointed in the direction of the château gates to begin the long journey home. This wasn't going to be the gentle amble around France the outward leg had been, more the quickest route through France to Calais. With a little luck, the party would sleep in their own beds for the first time in over a month. Today would be all about covering that distance in the shortest time possible, stops would be limited to refreshments and allowing for a change of drivers.

When Dan and Emma had made the decision to leave Britain, they saw no need to hurry back and had been in contact with their lawyers from France. There was already quite a bit of interest from dentists wanting to buy their practice. All the kids had quickly received permission from home to stay in France until just before it was time to head to Hogwarts. All the parents and guardians had been getting frequent letters and lots of photographs from their charges clearly indicating they were having a wonderful time. Letting them stay longer wasn't a hard decision to make.

Remus was at the wheel for the first stint with Dan sitting beside him as everyone waved goodbye to Sirius as they pulled away from what everyone inside the RV considered the best holiday of their life.

Emma was back with the kids and watching as her daughter comforted Harry, the boy really had no experience of leaving loved ones and needed Hermione's support at the moment. Just having Hermione beside him though meant Harry couldn't be down for long, he attempted to lift the air of sadness that had settled over everyone that their holiday was ending.

"Ok, summer holidays might be almost over but it's less than four months before our Christmas ones begin. You are all invited to spend them in France with us and bring your families along. It's not as if we don't have the room and you know the elves would love having loads of guests in the house."

This really cheered everyone up, especially when Hermione jokingly confirmed she would be coming. Emma was still trying to get her head around how much of an effect Harry had on her family, his use of 'we' and 'us' had a lump in her throat while tears were threatening to form in the corners of her eyes. In the space of the summer holidays Emma Granger had gotten a son, and she knew Dan felt exactly the same way. What do you say to someone who's changed your world?

Emma decided just to keep it light. She hugged Harry and kissed his cheek while confirming that she and Dan would clear their schedules to make sure they would be there. Both Harry and Emma knew there was more being said with the hug and the smile was back on Harry's face.

They may have been sticking to the motorways and stopping at service stations but this was still an adventure to the majority of those aboard the RV. The traffic gods were smiling down on them and they made good time to Calais.

Both Weasleys were astonished at the scale of the port and blown away by the sheer size of the ferries. Ginny was suffering from a panic attack and appeared ready to pass out as Dan drove their vehicle straight into the belly of the beast. Harry and Hermione were desperately trying to console her but having no success. It wasn't until they reached the upper deck and Ginny could see the sea and

sky that she showed any signs of calming. A trip to one of the restaurants had her once more glancing around in amazement.

Luna whispered in her ear. "Just wait until you see the shops. I know you and Ron have already bought some gifts for your family but how do you think your dad would react to getting something bought on a ship that was crossing the channel?"

Ginny didn't have to answer her friend, both knew her father would love anything muggle but this would be special.

When they all headed down to the shopping area, Ginny's gaze immediately settled on a die cast model of the ferry and the youngest Weasley knew she didn't have to look any further. A box of fancy chocolates for her mum were soon followed by a few giant triangular things called Toblerone for the twins and Percy. Hermione had assured Ginny it was a type of confectionary and they would enjoy it.

The entire party then gathered on the deck as the last rays of sunshine were reflected back of the famous chalk cliffs of Dover, they were almost home.

The RV stopped shortly after clearing Dover, the holiday was now officially over.

"Dobby can start popping everyone home while Emma and I drive the RV back to the hire outfit. Luna, you're still staying with us since that's what we arranged with your father and he's not back until next week so you'll need to say goodnight to Ron here."

Dan didn't need to say anything to Neville, Susan was already saying goodnight to him before Dobby popped her and Hannah off home. Neville was next and then the Weasleys. Remus was staying in Crawley for the weekend until the lunar cycle forced him to leave for Hogwarts, he apparated there while Dobby popped the three kids to the Granger home.

Dan started the engine and found Emma by his side. "What a summer. I still can hardly believe it all happened."

Emma rested her head on his shoulder. "Any regrets or doubts?"

Dan switched lanes as the traffic thinned out, taking his time to answer. "I don't think so. I'm very excited about our move to France, and we don't even have to search for accommodation. The situation with Hermione and Harry is still something I'm coming to terms with but have you ever seen our little girl happier?"

A kiss on the cheek told Dan his wife agreed with that opinion. He continued on in the same vein. "Harry is certainly someone who grows on you, I can hardly imagine our lives without him in them anymore. Did I mention I have a little revenge planed for those horrid relations of his?"

Emma was now sitting up straight in her seat. "Daniel Granger, you know fine well you've never mentioned anything of the sort. I assume you're just about to?"

A little smirk played over Dan's features. "Sirius, Remus and I sat a couple of times and discussed a few things to do to the Dursleys, I never want those two angry at me. Anyway, once I had talked them both out of anything to do with dismemberment, we came up with something to hurt their pride. Dobby was only too willing to help."

Dan paused until he heard the growl coming from his wife. She wanted details and it wouldn't be prudent to keep her waiting much longer. "Well everything we've learned about the Dursleys tells us they are the worst kind of social climbers. I thought it would be poetic justice to rub their noses in what they had but didn't want."

Emma could hear a trace of anger in her husband's voice as he spoke of the Dursleys not wanting Harry, and she loved him all the more for it.

"How anyone could not want Harry is beyond me. Hell, Ginny's mother was ready to start world war three to get him into her family yet the Dursleys only saw a freak. Anyway, once I heard about Harry's wine problem, an idea began to germinate in my head."

"If you don't tell me what this idea is in the next few minutes, I'm going to start becoming annoyed."

"Right, well we're going to put a tiny dent in Harry's wine surplus by delivering a special crate of it to every resident of Privet Drive, all

except one that is. Did I forget to mention these bottles have specially printed labels with Harry's picture on them? The crate also has a picture of him standing in front of the Potter château."

Emma was trying to imagine how the Dursleys would react to that when Dan provided the kicker. "There is also a letter attached, thanking everyone for making his stay in Privet Drive such a pleasant one. It goes on to explain that Harry won't be back in Privet Drive as he's taken up his family title and will now live abroad. The letter is signed Lord Harry James Potter and has his family crest embossed into the paper."

Emma's eyes were sparkling as she anticipated the consequences for the Dursleys. News like that would spread like wildfire over the entire community of Little Whinging. The Dursleys would find themselves bombarded with questions at every turn, questions they had no answers for. That, combined with discovering their nephew is a wealthy lord who they threw out their house, would go a little way to extracting some revenge for Harry.

"When did you get so devious?"

"Hey, I live with two of the smartest girls I've ever met. I need to be devious just to survive."

The couple actually enjoyed the drive back to the hire firm. All that remained to do was park the RV in their forecourt and place the keys into their secure holding box. Dobby had dealt with all the luggage and the interior of the RV gleamed as if new, he also had them both home only seconds after they called him.

-oOoOo-

Augusta Longbottom was struggling to equate this tanned young wizard who was currently chatting away to her with the shy, nervous boy who was her grandson. The only thing she was finding harder to believe was some of the photographs in front of her. In every single one, Neville was not only smiling but he was surrounded by his friends. It was also hard to miss that Amelia Bones' niece was right beside him in almost all of them.

All the kids had arranged to meet at the Grangers for their last defence lesson on Sunday, Augusta couldn't help but think this was the best thing that ever happened to her grandson.

-oOoOo-

A similar, though noisier scene was currently taking place at the Burrow breakfast table. Arthur was enchanted with his metal model of the ferry, especially since the doors opened and you could see the tiny cars and coaches inside.

"You really drove into the belly of the ship?"

Ginny was telling the story for the umpteenth time while the twins were busy trying to fathom the hidden meaning behind the confectionary their sister had bought them. They even fed a piece to Scabbers just in case this was a prank. When Ron offered to be a tester too, they gave it a try and were relatively quiet for the rest of the morning.

Molly watched on as her family behaved as normally as they ever did, she thought this would be the perfect time to announce her intentions.

"Ginny, we want to hold a belated birthday party for you, one where you can invite all your friends over."

This got the immediate attention of all the Weasley children, wondering just what their mother was up to now.

"I also would like you to invite the Grangers. I was rude to them yet they still took you both on holiday and treated you like family. I owe them an apology."

The tension that had built up in the room quickly died as excitement took its place.

"We'll shop for your school things tomorrow, Sunday you're at the Grangers so we could make it Monday. You're all back to Hogwarts on Wednesday."

Ron was in quickly. "Luna's dad comes back on Monday, could we invite him too? Luna might not be able to make it otherwise."

Both twins thought this was the perfect opportunity to tease their brother over his new girlfriend but settled instead for some gentle joking. "Aw mum, we couldn't have that."

"Yeah, Luna appears to have taught Ron some table manners. She needs to be here."

"Of course Xeno's welcome, we should probably invite Neville's gran and Hannah's parents too? You want to invite Amelia Arthur?"

"I think that's a great idea. The kids have been together for most of the holidays, a party just before they all head off to Hogwarts would be the perfect way to end the summer."

Arthur noticed Ginny appeared quite sheepish about the whole idea and asked his daughter what the matter was. "Mum, dad, I love the idea of a party. I was wondering if it could just be a summer party though, and not one for my birthday?"

Molly was quite hurt by her daughter's request. "Why would you not want a birthday party?"

Ron then showed that Luna was rubbing off on him by diffusing the whole situation and helping his sister out. "It's not that she doesn't want a birthday party mum, more like she's already had one. We celebrated Ginny's birthday when we stayed at the château and all her friends have already given her presents. That necklace she's wearing was a gift from Harry and Hermione, I don't think she's taken it off since they gave it to her."

Ginny was now blushing as she showed her necklace to her family. It was a fine gold chain with a golden angel charm hanging from it. "It's a guardian angel with charms and runes placed on it, it protects the wearer from all forms of mental attack. They had it especially made for me at a magical jewellers in France."

Molly could see it was a beautiful gift but it was the practicality of the necklace that touched her heart. Had her daughter possessed a necklace like this before she started Hogwarts, that diary wouldn't have worked and most of last year's events would have been nullified. Although Molly had no way of knowing the necklace and charms cost the equivalent of a year's salary for Arthur, she could

easily guess at the comfort wearing it provided for Ginny. She was not going to turn this into an argument.

"Very well then, no candles or Happy Birthday written on the cake but I'm still making a cake."

That declaration received absolutely no arguments from the Weasley family, Molly's cakes were legendary and no one was about to pass up on one of them.

Ron sounded the only sour note. "Professor Lupin won't be able to make it on Monday, it's too close to the full moon. That's why our last lesson will be Sunday."

Molly was slightly shocked at the change in attitude of her youngest son. "You continued your lessons while on holiday?"

Ron nodded as his wand shot into his hand from the wrist holder they all now wore. "Expecto Patronum."

A silver Jack Russell terrier shot out Ron's wand and paraded up and down their kitchen table before disappearing.

Percy had been quiet all morning but it was left to him to break the silence that followed Ron's demonstration. "That's a corporal patronus. I'm head boy and I can't cast one of those."

Ron couldn't help but laugh at his family's reaction to his spell. "You should see Harry's, his is simply amazing."

Ginny was nodding in agreement as the rest of the family struggled to comprehend what they just witnessed. "Professor Lupin is a wonderful teacher, he has us all working on this charm. Luna and me can only manage some mist at the moment but the rest of them all have an animal patronus."

Percy was flabbergasted but asked the obvious question. "Why would he be teaching you something so advanced? That's NEWT level and beyond."

The rest of the family wanted to know the answer to that question as well so Ron provided them with one.

"It's really simple. The ministry are using dementors to hunt for escaped criminals. Potter's law says that anything that can go wrong is bound to happen to Harry sooner rather than later. Using that theory, it's only a matter of time before he comes face to face with one of these things."

Ginny jumped in as the two youngest Weasleys began to mimic the twins' way of speaking. "As Harry's friends, we have to be ready for anything."

Ron wholeheartedly agreed. "Harry never goes looking for trouble, it just has his address and likes to keep in touch."

All the Weasley kids were laughing at that analogy and began to provide their sceptical parents with examples.

"Quidditch is a dangerous sport, who else but Harry would have his broom jinxed during his first ever match."

Fred remembered the incident well. "Yeah, George and me thought he was a gonner for sure. We were underneath Harry hoping to grab him when it tossed him off."

Ginny couldn't help but comment on what she herself had seen. "That rogue bludger was no picnic either, chased after him the entire match before finally breaking his arm."

Percy couldn't resist having a little dig at his mother's former idol. "Yes, and that was before Lockhart removed all the bones in his arm while supposedly trying to fix it."

Both Molly and Arthur were wide-eyed listening to these tales but Ron had the last word. "What nobody has mentioned though is that Harry caught the snitch in each of those incidents, he's never been beaten and doesn't know how to give up. that's why when trouble finds him, he's kicked its arse every time. Em bum?"

Ginny tried to save her brother's arse. "And his friends are always there to help him."

Molly decided to let Ron's slip go, she'd certainly made enough of them herself this summer. "Ok, breakfast is over so get your washing down here and then tidy your rooms. Diagon Alley for

Hogwarts supplies tomorrow, Ron and Ginny heading for the Granger on Sunday and then party at the Burrow on Monday. We'll also need the garden de-gnomed..."

The five Weasley children shot out of there as if fired from a canon before they could be assigned that tedious task. Arthur chuckled as he was left thinking things may be looking up for the Weasley family but something's will never change.

-oOoOo-

Harry and the girls were woken by owls delivering their Hogwarts letters and book lists, a decision was then jointly made to tackle Diagon Alley today. With Remus offering to accompany them, the party of six set off for London. The instant their group stepped into the Leaky Cauldron all sound stopped, Harry was painfully reminded of his first visit there with Hagrid.

Dan and Emma got to see another example of just how famous Harry was, they were mobbed with well-wishers and Remus had to act as bodyguard as the kids were getting swamped. On reaching the alley itself, the reaction was repeated all over again.

When the arch opened they could see people busily rushing from one shop to the next, it appeared as if they were all trying to get their business done as quickly as possible and then get out of there. When someone called out Harry's name, the effect was incredible. From their vantage point, the group could see the effect pass down the Alley like a ripple. People's heads suddenly came up and the expressions of hope expressed there were painful to watch. There was a surge in their direction but this reaction had now been expected and anticipated.

Remus got the kids into the apothecary and guarded the door while the three students got their supplies for school. A flustered Emma asked him if it was always like this and the new Hogwarts professor considered his answer carefully.

"Amelia's letter told us the ministry's announcement that Voldemort's attempted return had been thwarted had somewhat backfired on them. Instead of jubilation, it was met with fear that his return was remotely possible in the first place. The ministry's assurances that

he was definitely gone this time fell on deaf ears, the people thought he was definitely gone the last time."

Both Granger parents could understand that viewpoint and Remus then drew their attention to the posters that currently adorned every piece of exposed brickwork in the Alley. Clearly visible were multiple copies of wanted posters featuring Sirius Black or Albus Dumbledore. Remus had explained before they left for France that Sirius was considered the most dangerous murderer in Britain and now the Prophet had apparently been publishing information on Dumbledore that exposed his misdeeds and clearly criminal actions.

"So now we have the possibility that the vilest dark lord in living memory could return, his number one supporter has broken out of Azkaban and is currently on the loose. Meanwhile the supposed leader of the light is shown to be nothing more than a man hungry for power, a man who didn't care how he held on to it either. People have a natural distrust of their governments so that leaves only one person the British wizarding community feel they can count on."

Emma saw exactly where this was leading and whispered the name. "Harry."

"Exactly, seeing him in the Alley today is like a confirmation that all will be right with their world again. When people become so frightened that it affects their daily lives, they look for any symbol of hope to cling onto. Harry Potter is that symbol for magical Britain."

"I thought Augusta and Amelia were exaggerating when they said it would be a disaster for Harry to leave Hogwarts, I'm beginning to see what they meant."

Dan and Remus were left riding shotgun on the group as they had to force a path through the crowd to get from shop to shop while Emma followed closely with the kids. News that Harry Potter was in Diagon Alley had spread like wildfire and everyone apparently wanted to see him for themselves. The only thing stopping the group getting the hell out of there was the joy expressed on everyone's faces. They were in absolutely no danger in Diagon Alley as anyone lifting a hand or wand against Harry would in all probability have been ripped to pieces by the adoring crowd.

Getting inside Gringotts massive doors gave them a minute to regroup.

"Wow, that was something else. Usually I just get stared at and the occasional handshake, today is just mental. Here's hoping Hogwarts is nothing like that."

"Yeah, I was beginning to think I was betrothed to Prince William."

This earned a chuckle from her mother, "So was I Hermione, so was I."

Luna was left to ask the obvious question. "Who's Prince William?"

No one got time to answer the girl as Ragnok made an unprecedented appearance on the main floor of the bank. He marched straight over to greet them. "Lord Potter, it's a pleasure to see you and your family again. Could I impose on you for a few moments of your time? It concerns family business."

"Of course Ragnok, how can we help?"

Remus and Luna both understood that family business excluded them but had their dealings at Gringotts seen to at once. Ragnok coming out to greet Lord Potter raised Harry's standing dramatically inside Gringotts. Any friend of Lord Potter's would not be waiting in a queue to be served. Remus left with Luna to continue their shopping while the others met with the goblin leader.

They had hardly sat in Ragnok's office when the pleasantries were dispensed with, it was straight down to business. "Lord Potter, the goblin nation owes you a great debt for contacting us over our missing goblin."

Harry was about to interrupt but Dan's hand on his shoulder stopped him, he could see this was something Ragnok needed to say.

"It is impossible for a goblin to be affected by Voldemort's type of soul magic, our physiology physically prohibits this. He must have voluntarily joined with this filth, for a goblin to do that sickens us. More importantly, can you imagine the reaction of witches and wizards if this incident ever became public knowledge? We would be ruined as everyone rushed to claim their gold from Gringotts."

"There is certainly no debt between us Ragnok. The trust I have in you and the goblin nation will not be affected by the actions of one rogue goblin. How are Frank and Sibyll?"

Ragnok's smile was wide and toothy. "A most unusual couple if I do say so. Frank has served in his country's military and has honour enough to be considered a goblin. They now live in a cottage on the Somerset coast, just outside the Exmoor National Park."

All four were pleased at this news.

'They resisted all attempts to offer them anything bigger or grander, claiming this was exactly what they wanted. We purchased the orchard adjacent to their property, that will give them plenty of room to raise their daughter. I know you wished to have a hand in paying for these things but goblin honour dictated we must care for the people who saved us from this potential catastrophe. We also dug the body up from where Frank had buried him and fed it to our dragons. This filth did not deserve a warrior's burial and is now literally dragon dung."

Harry never wanted to be the subject of goblin anger, even death didn't spare you from it. "I assume you have the building warded, and perhaps even watched? I would like to know when their daughter is born and that everything is fine."

"Their chickens won't even have to worry about foxes, nothing trying to harm any creature on that land will get through our wards. Their cottage is one of the safest places in England."

Harry told Ragnok they would be moving to France and he immediately offered to contact their Paris branch and have them placed at his disposal. He also offered Gringotts services to arrange the transfer of the Granger's business to France. When he mentioned the tax breaks this would give them, Dan and Emma agreed at once.

They made their way back onto Diagon Alley and the whole place had taken on an atmosphere that was almost a carnival compared to what it had been earlier. The Alley and shops were now bustling with people who were enjoying shopping, comforted by the knowledge that, with Harry Potter in the Alley, they would be safe.

Dan thought it was illogical, improbable and quite a few other words he could think of. What he couldn't deny though was the evidence that was right in front of him, these people really did think a twelve year old boy was their saviour.

Further evidence was provided by three beautiful older girls who rushed Harry and started hugging and kissing him. The laughter from Hermione told the Granger parents that these were not strangers. With the jealous stares from every witch in the Alley over the age of eight, the girls stopped their displays of affection but were still all smiles.

"Mum, dad, this is Alicia, Katie and Angelina. They're Harry's Gryffindor Quidditch teammates from Hogwarts."

"Oh you've no idea how glad we were to hear you were coming back. Oliver was inconsolable when he found out you were leaving."

Katie confirmed Alicia's sentiments to the Grangers. "Harry's the best seeker in Hogwarts, we won every game last year."

Dan thought he was being cool with his answer. "Harry, I would really like to see a Quidditch match. You never told me it was played by beautiful young ladies."

Hermione was mortified but was saved from further embarrassment when Harry and the three chasers all burst out laughing.

"Emma, can we take Dan into Quality Quidditch Supplies for a moment? I want to get him a Holyhead Harpies poster."

The timbre of Emma's voice told Harry and Hermione that Dan would suffer for his crass comment later. "That sounds fine Harry. I might get one of those beater bat things, I can think of someone I'd like to practice on later."

This drew more laughter but they all headed for the Quidditch store. When Dan saw the aforementioned poster, he definitely wanted one. Emma too was enthralled to watch the players flying about. The manager appeared with a specific poster already in his hand.

"Lord Potter, ladies, could I have a moment of your time? We've been running a Gryffindor Quidditch Poster this summer and its become our biggest seller. I was wondering if you could sign one for me?"

The distaste was there in Harry's face for everyone to see, the manager though attempted to persuade him. "I would display it in the window to be raffled, with all the proceeds going to St. Mungo's hospital. I would also ensure I got the other three's signature too, I want the full team's signatures on this."

Alicia was the quickest to spot a deal here. "I would be delighted to sign your poster, provided I got a free one?"

The manager could see he had the boy swithering, the cost of a few free posters would easily be offset by having a Harry Potter signed one displayed in the window. "Why Miss Spinnet, that's a deal I would be happy to offer the entire team."

Harry agreed and signed the poster only to find a blushing Katie offering hers to be signed.

"Harry, I know you hate this stuff but could you sign mine as my teammate? I think it would be so cool to have one signed by the entire team."

As he was being asked to sign as Harry potter, seeker and not the hyphenated boy he quickly agreed. "Only if you'll sign mine Katie, I think that's a great idea."

They left the shop, Dan had his Harpies' poster and Emma with a Gryffindor one. Hermione had saucily said that she didn't need a poster, she got to kiss the real thing every day. She did accept the Gryffindor shirt from Harry with Potter on the back though.

The trip to the bookstore was again a surprise as Hermione only bought the books she needed for Hogwarts and nothing else. She finally responded to the strange glances she was receiving. "What's the point in buying books when there's that wonderful library at the Château? Dobby told me he could easily get me any book I want from there."

By the time they met up with Remus and Luna in Madam Malkins, Dan was saddled with the task of transporting what appeared to be a miniature tiger in a basket weave carry cage. A bandy-legged ugly tiger at that. Hermione cooing at the creature through the bars left no doubt just who the animal belonged to. Luna and Remus were being fitted for robes as Harry and Hermione joined the queue.

Remus made a fine figure standing there in his new robes for Hogwarts but Harry could see he was somewhat torn, he was also pretty sure he knew what the problem was. "Remus, you earned every knut of that money and more. You are going to be the best defence professor Hogwarts has had in donkeys' years."

Luna agreed. "Certainly better than Lockhart."

Remus was now smiling. "Thanks Luna, with a ringing endorsement like that, I can't possibly fail."

Harry then explained to the girl serving that he wanted the Potter crest on the Hogwarts robes for himself and his betrothed.

Emma had a lump in her throat as she saw her daughter standing there, proudly wearing her new robes with the Potter family crest on them and twirling the betrothal ring on her finger. The wide smile on Hermione's face dispelled any of her doubts though, her daughter's happiness was hard to miss.

It was a happy bunch who headed back to Crawley where Dobby would have their dinner waiting on them. Remus knew he would be torn when it came time to leave but he would see the kids every day at Hogwarts. He was also looking forward to spending his first Christmas with friends for many years.

-oOoOo-

Albus Dumbledore watched from the edge of the Forbidden Forest as preparations were being made for the children's return to Hogwarts. He found it difficult to believe he had been lambasted because a beast Salazar Slytherin himself had placed inside the castle had unfortunately been released on a few students, yet here were the ministry surrounding the castle with over one hundred of the most deadly and foul creatures known to wizardkind.

Placing Dementors at Hogwarts was an act of such utter folly that only the ministry of magic could have come up with that suggestion, far less put it into practice. What they failed to take into consideration was that, should anything go wrong, the ministry would be faced with an unmitigated disaster of such magnitude and monstrosity that the public would physically drag them out their precious building and hang them from the nearest projection they could throw a rope over.

This would leave Britain wide open for a powerful wizard to retake control and become the voice of reason once more. What were Albus Dumbledore's few mistakes when held up against the horrors their own ministry of magic had just brought about?

The icing on the cake though would be the unfortunate death of a certain Harry Potter. The witches and wizards of Britain would practically beg him to return and look after them when their own ministry of magic was clearly responsible for the death of their saviour.

All Albus had to do was ensure such a tragedy occurred. Since no living person understood the Hogwarts wards like he did, it really shouldn't be too difficult to collapse them at an opportune moment. Then all he needed was a few initial victims for the dementors to feed on. A few fresh souls should be enough to trigger a feeding frenzy and then there were hundreds more young souls conveniently nearby.

Salazar wanted to cleanse Hogwarts with his Basilisk but Albus Dumbledore intended to show him how it should be done. It was a pity though that no one could ever know he engineered the entire event. If he couldn't be headmaster of Hogwarts then no one would, he'd see the castle closed forever first.

A/N Thanks for reading

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters and my writing certainly couldn't be considered canon. If my efforts don't fit your idea of what a Harry Potter story should be, I can only offer my apologies and a suggestion. Writing your own really is the only way to ensure the story progresses exactly the way you want it to, it also gives the rest of us something to read.

Chapter 19

Dan and Emma found this visit to the Burrow to be a lot more welcoming than their last. Xeno Lovegood led the procession of parents and guardians who thanked them for taking their children to France.

"I gave you my little girl to look after and I come home to find a young lady waiting on me, I can't thank you enough. Raising my daughter on my own has not been easy, Luna's really missed having a woman she could talk to. Just watching the way she now acts with her friends warms my heart, she's no longer trying to disappear into the brickwork."

They heard Luna laugh and turned round to see her and Ginny laughing at something that had obviously just embarrassed Ron.

"I even like her choice of boyfriend. The Weasleys are a fine, upstanding family."

Emma felt a bit of a fraud accepting the credit Xeno was dispensing here, she tried to place it where she thought it belonged. "I think Hermione had more to do with that than me, the two girls have grown really close over the summer. I know Luna looks to Hermione like a big sister. Ron, Harry and Neville are all fine young lads, it really was a pleasure to have them and the girls with us this summer."

They now had an audience as Augusta, Amelia and the Abbots all commented on how much their children had enjoyed their summer, and how much they had learned.

This raised a chuckle from Arthur. "Wait until you see them cast a patronus, Ron said that only Ginny and Luna had still to find their corporal form."

This was something the parents had to see so the kids were summoned over. Ron's terrier was soon joined by Hermione's otter, Neville's bear, Susan's Welsh pony and Hannah's badger. This led to a lot of jaws hitting the floor but Arthur wasn't finished yet.

"Harry, Ron tells us your patronus is simply amazing. Could we see it?"

Harry reluctantly drew his wand. He didn't want to outdo his friends in front of their parents but it was a request he really couldn't refuse. His patronus though would eclipse anyone's. The golden stag regally paraded around the garden before approaching Hermione and nuzzling at her neck. Everyone who hadn't seen Prongs before watched in awe as Hermione scratched the stag below its chin, showing the form was almost solid.

The amount of love the stag was radiating affected everyone at the burrow. Luna had her dad back, her boyfriend was by her side and she was surrounded by all her friends. The emotions from Prongs led Luna to believe this might be the time she would get more than mist from her wand. She performed the spell exactly as Professor Lupin had taught them only this time a silver hare was now bounding around the Burrow.

This left Ginny as the only one in the group yet to cast a corporal patronus, the little redhead wasn't about to stand there and let that fact go unchallenged. She'd loved her time spent with the Grangers but this was what she'd dreamed of. All her friends visiting the Burrow and having a good time. Her wand was producing lots of silver mist and it appeared as though she wasn't going to get the spell today until Harry intervened.

He leaned forward and whispered in Ginny's ear. "Look at your dad, see how proud he is of you?"

One glance was all Ginny needed, she cast the spell again and a silver swallow began weaving it's way elegantly and effortlessly through the people standing and applauding the two girls.

Ginny and Luna were soon receiving many hugs of congratulations and Molly couldn't miss how much the Grangers' opinion meant to the girls. It was time to apologise to these people. It was only minutes later that she saw them alone and made her move.

"Mr and Mrs Granger, I owe your family an apology. My eldest son went to great lengths to explain to me that what I thought was best for my children was not necessary what they would consider to be so. I can now see how wrong I was and hope you can forgive me."

Molly was almost in tears as she said the next bit. "My Ginny faced an ordeal at Hogwarts no child should ever be faced with, yet it's clear to me now that you have done more to help her recover from this than I have."

It was also clear to both Dan and Emma that Molly truly meant what she said, she felt she'd failed as a mother and it was eating away at the woman.

"We'll gladly accept your apology Molly but I'm afraid we can't take the praise. The kids have all helped each other out over the summer, we were merely there in a supervisory role. With Dobby taking care of all the cooking and cleaning, Dan and I just had the best holiday we've ever had."

Dan agreed with his wife. "That's right, and Molly, it's Dan and Emma. Harry wants everyone to get together for Christmas and you are all invited to France for the holidays. His place there is enormous so the more the merrier."

Molly gladly accepted the peace offering. "That sounds wonderful and I think you can bank on the Weasleys being there for at least some of the holidays."

Everyone else agreed with the idea and arrangements would be made through the kids nearer the time. With her apology made and accepted, Molly could now relax and they all enjoyed a wonderful day. The Granger parents even got to watch an impromptu game of quidditch and Amelia promised them an invitation to Hogwarts whenever Harry played. That was an invitation they were really looking forward to accepting.

Amelia's other revelation wasn't quite as well received, she didn't blame the Granger parents one iota.

"Excuse me Amelia, but Remus told us Dementors were amongst the foulest creatures on Earth. Why then would a government surround a school with these things?"

"Dan, you are not asking anything I haven't already demand answers to. I was told they were there for our protection. There are two wanted criminals on the loose and the ministry has to be seen to be doing something."

This left both Granger parents shaking their heads, though not in surprise. It would appear that, in payment for their magical gene, most wizards and witches had to give up the one known as common sense.

"All I can do is bar these creatures from any part of the school property. Outside or boundaries, I have no control over where these creatures go."

Dan and Emma were beginning to wish they had pursued the home-schooled option for Harry and Hermione a bit more vigorously. Their only consolation was that, once inside Hogwarts, the kids should be safe. They would have to discuss with them about their proposed trips to Hogsmead, though they knew they were all looking forward to those weekends.

There was one thing they could be sure of though, Harry would do his utmost to ensure no harm came to Hermione. Scant consolation to the thought they wouldn't see them until December. The Granger family may have increased in number over the summer but also had never been closer, Kings Cross was going to be particularly hard this year.

-oOoOo-

Harry's entrance onto platform nine and three quarters saw every head turn in their direction, this action presented a dilemma he wasn't familiar with. Normally Harry couldn't wait to board the train but this time he had a family to say goodbye to.

Dan and Emma would be leaving Kings Cross to cross the road and catch the Eurostar from St Pancras to Paris. Dobby would meet them there and transfer them to their new home. Even the

excitement generated by that life-changing event couldn't mask their reluctance to be parted from the children.

The attention they were receiving though was becoming intrusive so hugs and promises to write were exchanged and the kids were helped onto the train. The parents knew that the kids would soon be surrounded by their friends. Neville actually appeared to give them a hand and lead them to the compartment they had already claimed. Hermione was particularly glad of his help since she now had a wicker cage as well as her trunk to manage. That Crookshanks let everyone know what he thought of being confined didn't help.

They were soon settling into a carriage that also contained Hannah and Susan. Luna was travelling to Kings Cross with the Weasleys who were apparently maintaining their tradition of always running late.

Crookshanks was happily curled on his mistress's lap and allowing her to make up for the indignity of confining him to that basket by scratching him behind the ears. When those same ears detected the arrival of others to their compartment, the part kneazle became alert once more. The greetings exchanged were also met by the train beginning to move out the station, there was a mad dash to the window to wave to those relatives still remaining.

The group had finally settled down when Scabbers made his first appearance, he crawled out of Ron's pocket in search of scraps of food. The rat almost unwittingly and certainly unwillingly almost became a meal himself as the part kneazle exploded off his mistress's lap with a speed and grace that belied his less than streamlined appearance.

Harry would have loved to sit there and watch Crooks crunch on Pettigrew's bones but that wouldn't see his godfather gain his freedom. Crooks may have been quick, but Harry wasn't the youngest Hogwarts seeker in over a century because his reactions were slow.

Crookshanks found himself snatched out of mid-air by his mistress's mate. Anyone else preventing him protecting his mistress would have received a right good scratching, the part kneazle contained himself to giving the messy haired human a severe hissing at. Crooks was soon in the arms of his mistress once more.

"Bloody hell Hermione, I thought poor Scabbers was done for there for sure. Are you certain that beast isn't part Tiger?"

Hermione was cuddling her pet closer. "Sorry Ron but Crooks is a cat who just spotted a rat, instinct must have just taken over. He didn't know Scabbers is your pet, I'll explain it to him. He and Hedwig get on brilliantly so there shouldn't be a problem."

Crookshanks was staring right at his mistress so when Hermione was explaining the creature was her friend's pet, there was a noticeable spark of magic that passed between them.

Hermione was stopped in mid flow and turned to Harry, looking for confirmation of what just happened. "What was that?"

"I don't know but the same thing happened between Hedwig and me not long after Hagrid gave her to me. I'm sure that's how she always seems to know when I need her."

Meanwhile Hermione clearly felt Crookshanks' disgust and distrust at being ordered to leave the false creature alone. Hermione rubbed his ears before pulling her familiar closer. "Oh, he's such a clever boy." When the cat was so close no one in the compartment could possibly hear, she whispered to him. "Please do this for me Crookshanks."

The cat looked from his mistress toward Hedwig before accepting and snuggling into his mistress' embrace. A decision had been passed between cat and owl, a close eye would be kept on the creature who was a threat to their humans.

Ron was currently holding the false creature in front of him, staring into Scabber's eyes and wondering why there wasn't a familiar bond forming. His friends knew why this wouldn't happen and also understood Ron would be traumatised when he discovered just how big a rat Scabbers was.

Neville was desperate to draw his wand and let the rat have it, he could only imagine how much will power it took for Harry to stop Crookshanks from biting the rat's head off. "Ron, Scabbers isn't looking too well?"

"Yeah I know, I almost didn't bring him to Hogwarts. What changed my mind is that he always seems better when he's around me, Scabbers will be spending most of this year in my pocket."

Luna broke off a piece of biscuit and offered it to Scabbers, Neville, Susan and Hannah were soon following her example, as the rat became the centre of attention.

Ginny understood she wasn't in the centre of the group, the girl was fine with that. Luna had grown very close to Hermione over the course of the summer while Susan and Hannah had been best friends for many years. When you factored in the number of the group who were dating each other then she was always going to be somewhat sidelined. This gave her time to observe how her group of friends worked and watch the relationships with each other. Her current observations were telling her that something was off here.

Ginny didn't survive all those years living with her twin brothers without being able to spot when something was going on. She smelled a rat, and it wasn't Scabbers.

About an hour later, Luna excused herself to head to the toilet and Ginny was right on her heels. They were no sooner out of earshot of their compartment when Ginny confronted her friend.

"What was all that back there? Please don't insult my intelligence by saying nothing. Ron's genuinely worried about Scabbers and doesn't need people making a fool of him over it."

Luna had a moment of panic before deciding how to handle this situation. She didn't want to lie to Ginny but, at the same time, she couldn't tell her the truth. "Just think who was in that compartment Ginny. Do you think anyone there would make a fool of Ron? Do you think I would be in with something like that? I now have friends and a boyfriend, you think I would throw all that away to make a fool of Ron? You're one of only two people I've ever told how much I like him, why would I throw that away?"

The little redhead was unimpressed. "Nice try Luna, I couldn't help but notice though that you never once said there was nothing going on."

"Ginny, I give you my word nothing is going on back there that would make a fool out of Ron. No one back there would stand for that, especially Harry and Hermione."

This seemed to appease her friend so Luna pushed on. "You'll have to trust us Ginny, we know what we're doing. Ron will definitely benefit but the timing has to be right. Have a think about that while I need to go pee, the Burrow could do with more toilets."

Ginny was left to ponder what Luna had implied, yes there was something going on but Luna claimed that it would actually benefit Ron. The timing had to be right though which meant if she raised the matter it could cause problems. It all came down to a matter of trust and she knew Harry and Hermione had more than earned hers.

Ginny was well aware Luna had been smitten with Ron since she was about six and figured the only other person she would tell would be Hermione. There was also the fact that Harry and Hermione would never stand to see anyone made a fool of. Someone trying to do that to her brother would see both react rather badly. Luna found Ginny still standing there, a nod was all that was needed to let the little blond know Ginny would keep quiet for now.

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Oh what Petunia Dursley wouldn't give for some peace and quiet? She felt safe for the moment as she'd reached the sanctuary of her house and had the door closed and locked. Every time one of her family set foot outside the door, they were forced to run the gauntlet of increasingly awkward questions from nosey neighbours.

That Petunia Dursley was usually considered the nosiest of them all was conveniently ignored. These vultures had no respect for people's privacy.

If she had to stand there one more time, listening about their nephew's generosity or how they must be proud of him, Petunia was sure she would vomit all over the nosey bastards. That they were deliberately hounding her family for information could no longer be in any doubt. The Dursleys' quickly cobbled together cover story that they only pretended their nephew was a delinquent and attended that awful school was itself a cover story had more holes in it than Swiss cheese.

Her nosey neighbours smelt blood in the water and were circling her family like hungry sharks. Their reputation would be torn to shreds if even a small part of the real story saw the light of day.

Vernon had almost passed out when he was shown the image of the boy standing in front of that beautiful chateau, he'd then stormed away from the smirking neighbour, too angry to even speak. Her husband was trying to console himself by claiming the entire thing was an elaborate hoax, achieved by using their freakishness to get back at the Dursleys. He maintained the other residents of Privet Drive were all fools for buying into the hoax, the alternative was just too horrible for him to contemplate.

Petunia was certain it was all true, to pull off a hoax like this would cost more than Vernon earned working all summer. There was also the fact her mother had once shown her a picture of Lily's engagement ring, you could have probably bought Privet Drive in its entirety for the cost of that thing.

She'd never once mentioned the possibility of Potter's money to Vernon, positive that it would be sealed away in one of their freak banks and unavailable to normal people like them. Knowing it was there but beyond his reach would have driven her husband insane.

The very idea that the freak could be rich had reduced her Duddydums to bouts of tears, it took half a dozen presents to stop the copious flow of salty liquid down his cheeks. At least her precious baby was now back at Smeltings. Petunia had noticed some of her more unscrupulous neighbours eyeing the apple of her eye like a precious morsel of information. Dudley couldn't be relied upon not to spill secrets the Dursleys didn't want known, especially if cakes, biscuits or sweets were used as an enticement. It would only take one glance at her precious boy to see the way to loosen his tongue was through his stomach.

Petunia was left hoping some of her pursuers would overindulge in their free 'fabulously exclusive and clearly expensive' wine, making total and public asses of themselves. This might give the Dursleys a break for a day or two. She had to admit though, having a fabulously wealthy lord living amongst you for a decade without your knowledge was a pretty big story to supersede. It would be a long

time before Lord Harry James Potter would be forgotten on Privet Drive. The Dursleys might even have to move.

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Harry had finally snapped and the latest group of giggling girls felt his wrath, it was just their bad luck that they were about the eighth bunch to approach him and ask for his autograph on something. The upshot though was that word soon spread throughout the train and they were left in peace for the rest of the journey along the length of Britain.

The group of friends were as surprised as everyone else when the train ground to a halt, apparently in the middle of nowhere. It was now dark outside and there was nothing to be seen as Hannah attempted to peer out the window.

"We can't be at Hogwarts yet, it's too soon."

Ron was quick with a joking reply. "Hermione, Harry's here so anything is possible."

The rest of the carriage didn't laugh at Ron's joke, they were all getting familiar with the Potter phenomenon.

Hannah was straining to see. "I'm sure there's something moving out there. It's so hard to see but I'm sure something entered the train a moment ago..."

Hannah stopped speaking as the windows began to frost over, even though the evening had been far too warm for that to happen naturally. Then the lights went out along the entire train and the yelling started.

The eight friends had their wands in their hands by this point, with Susan and Hermione casting the lumos charm to let them see what was going on. The glow from both girls' wands began to dim as the temperature in the compartment plummeted, it also filled with such a sense of impending dread as to freeze them into inaction.

Ginny watched as her friends began to shiver, and not entirely from the cold. It was only when there was a skeletal hand trying to open their compartment door, and she heard Susan moan that the

creature was a dementor, that Ginny realized what she had to do. Her angel was glowing warmly against her chest as she surmised it was protecting her from whatever it was doing to her friends. It was time for little Ginny Weasley to protect those very friends who had given her the tools and the means to fight back. She remembered how proud her father was of her when she finally cast the very difficult spell properly, Ginny was ready.

"Expecto Patronum."

A silvery white swallow began to fly rings around the now retreating dementor. The relief Ginny provided allowed Neville and Hannah to get their patronuses away too. The compartment now had a completely different atmosphere as patronus after patronus shot out the door to engage the dementor until Prongs finally made his appearance. Hermione casting her otter had pulled Harry from his vision of his mother's murder. To say Harry was angry would be an understatement.

The animals imitated their owners' behaviour in that they all worked together to deal with the deadly intruder. The dementor found itself harried by a menagerie of silver animals, all herding the creature in a specific direction. Once there, Prongs completed the route with a charge. The golden stag's antlers pierced straight through the creature's cloak and a terrible scream rang out the entire length of the train. This terrified every student who currently didn't have a patronus attacking the dark creature. Prongs was shaking the dying dementor about like a terrier with a rat, using his antlers to totally end the threat the dark creature posed. The other patronuses began to shot off along the train corridor to see if there were any more dementors on board the train.

Like everyone else, Percy heard the scream but with him it had the effect of pulling the head boy out of his stupor. Apart from his responsibilities to the students as head boy, Percy had four younger siblings on this train. He was racing down the corridor when a hare and swallow patronus flew past him. This brought him up short, just as a compartment door opened at the sight of the head boy.

"Percy, what was that scream?"

"Well that's Luna and Ginny's patronuses, so I can only assume a dementor boarded the train."

There were gasps of disbelief from the girls, but not about the dementor. "Looney can cast a patronus? Are you joking?"

Percy noticed the Ravenclaw robes the girls were wearing, he didn't pull his punches. "Yes she can. Luna spent the summer with Harry and Hermione and is now Ron's girlfriend."

He raced away and left them to digest that news, that was all the warning they were going to get. Percy had heard from Ron and Ginny about some of the treatment Luna had received inside Ravenclaw last year, it wouldn't happen while he was head boy. He reached a carriage where Harry's stag was standing guard at the entrance, the other patronuses were apparently patrolling the train to stop any more dementors boarding.

"Everyone ok in here?"

"Yes Percy, Ginny fired off her patronus and gave us all time to get organised."

The pride in Ron's voice was easy for them all to hear.

"Thank goodness for that, we have a train full of very frightened students. Seeing your patronuses patrolling the train is making everyone feel a lot better."

They all staggered for a second as the train once more got under way, the driver was obviously as keen to get out of here as they were. Sensing that the danger was now over, Prongs and his fellow patronuses faded until they were called again.

Susan began rummaging through their stash of sweets before dishing out chocolate frogs. "Auntie says chocolate is the best cure for being around those things. I don't know if there is any medical proof to that theory or it just makes her feel better but I'm for giving it a try."

For once Hermione didn't care about the science or magic behind something, the chocolate tasted wonderful and made her feel so much better.

Ginny was delighted she'd been able to help her friends, and to have positive proof just how well her necklace worked. She was sure there would be a letter heading off to that French jeweler with an order for a guardian angel for Hermione. Ginny was also sure there was something going on as Luna was feeding a little chocolate to Scabbers.

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Amelia was raging but was unable to vent at the moment, the new first years had just been sorted and this was her first chance to greet the students as headmistress of Hogwarts. She composed herself while the silence fell as she walked toward the famous old podium. "I would like to welcome everyone to another year at Hogwarts. My first act as Headmistress was going to be warning you about the ministry's placement of dementors around the school. I'm let to believe that they decided to introduce themselves on the express. Please be aware that dementors are amongst the foulest creatures on the planet. They cannot be reasoned with and will not ask questions before attacking, avoid these creatures at all costs."

This was getting far too serious and Fred just couldn't resist lightening the mood. "Hear that Harry?"

His partner in crime of course provided the punchline. "Yeah, leave the poor creatures alone."

This resulted in laughter, with even some cheering thrown in, before Amelia raised her hands for silence. "I have heard the story of what happened on the express and personally seen all the patronuses that were involved. I think twenty points to everyone who cast the charm on the express should be fair."

There was more cheering now as the house counters adjusted accordingly. Luna had just acquired more points at the opening feast than she did in total last year.

"Now I would like to introduce the person who taught all those students to cast a patronus, Hogwarts new defence teacher, Professor Lupin."

Remus took a quick bow as Amelia continued to run through the new professors that Hogwarts had this year. Professor Tonks got

the loudest cheer, but that was more to do with who she was replacing.

Amelia had one more announcement to make before the feast began. "Due to today's events on the express, I've asked Professor Lupin to suspend his proposed curriculum in favour of getting as many students as possible proficient at casting a patronus. Your right to visit Hogsmead might depend on being able to cast a shield against the dementors, I have no faith in the ministry saying they will not harm anyone. No one is going to put my students in danger if I have any say in it!"

Amelia had just handed the students another incentive to learn the charm. Not that they needed one, everyone on the train had felt the effect of the dementors. Who wouldn't want a defence against that?

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Dolores had also received a report of what had happened on the train and smelled an opportunity to put a certain young upstart in his place. Charges could easily be trumped up meaning the boy would toe the ministry line or be arrested. A morning trip to Hogwarts was going to be her first appointment tomorrow. It was time the magical community discovered just who was running the country.

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Harry and Neville had both found it very difficult to get any sleep, they now knew they were sharing their dorm with Peter Pettigrew. That it was going to be today that the real betrayer of the Potter family was finally exposed was settled by a nod between the two boys.

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Albus was secreted at the edge of the forbidden forest, his position carefully chosen so he could monitor as much of Hogwarts as possible. He was invisible and his occlumency protected him from the worst of the dementors effects. Shielding his mind also meant it was harder for the dementors to sense him, especially as he had no intention of moving. His intention was to observe and let the castle's occupants grow complacent before unleashing his scheme, that

decision was put on hold as he watched Umbridge lead half a dozen aurors into Hogwarts.

The former headmaster had already carried out all his preparations to cause a complete and catastrophic failure of the Hogwarts wards, his scheme could be implemented at a moment's notice. If his situation presented him with an advantageous set of circumstances, Hogwarts could find itself with a serious dementor infestation before noon.

The chance to blame the impending disaster on Umbridge might be too good an opportunity to pass up. Umbridge implicated in any way would see the end of Fudge, he would be run out the ministry before the sun set. With no one at the helm and most of wizarding Britain grieving, the situation would be ripe for some subtle manipulation. Albus still had a few supporters out there, and others could be persuaded. Albus Dumbledore could be back running the country before Halloween.

A/N Thanks for reading

Souls Abound is nearly finished and intend to stick with this story to its conclusion. Sorry to readers of 'A Different Halloween' but don't worry, I will be returning to that story shortly.

Chapter 20

Dolores came barrelling into the great hall, her six accompanying aurors marching in formation behind her. The head of the DMLE was obviously hoping to appear intimidating, she failed to pull it off for two reasons. That little girl voice she used just grated on your nerves and Conan the Barbarian couldn't pull off intimidating wearing a Dolores Umbridge trademark pink cardigan.

"Headmistress, sorry but this isn't a social call. I'm here to investigate the attack and unlawful killing of a ministry worker on the Hogwarts express. I have it on good authority certain of your students carried out this attack while the employee was carrying out their duties."

Amelia felt her hackles rising, but then again this woman always had that effect on her. "I'm sorry Madam Umbridge, you have me at a disadvantage. The only incident that I am aware of was a dementor boarding the express. It was driven off by some of my students, an act I was so proud of that they all were awarded housepoints at the opening feast by me."

"Hem, hem. The dementor was working for the ministry and my investigation shows it wasn't driven off, it was killed. There was a ministerial search of the train scheduled to check for the presence of Sirius Black or Albus Dumbledore. I'm here this morning to arrest those involved in disrupting that search and killing a ministerial worker who was merely carrying out their orders."

Amelia was stunned into silence while her brain caught up with what this bitch was saying.

Harry thought this was brilliant. He wanted all the attention he could get on them this morning. Having the Head of the DMLE and half a dozen aurors present in the hall was better than he could ever have hoped for. Harry also thought this latest effort to arrest him was ministerial stupidity taken to a whole new level, he wanted to laugh but decided instead to have some fun.

"Excuse me Madam Umbridge, what was the man's name? I assume it was male, did he leave a wife and kids behind? What department did he work for and what salary scale was he on? Do

the ministry have insurance or will his widow be suing me for loss of earnings?"

This was all stuff his uncle used to spout off about from his job in Grunnings, Harry could see it was having an effect on Umbridge as her complexion began to resemble Vernon Dursley's patented shade of puce. He wasn't sure if that may have been because the entire hall was now laughing at her, the twins may have started the chuckles but everyone was now vocally expressing how laughable her supposed charges were. Harry gave a subtle signal to Neville before continuing to bait the obnoxious witch.

"I think his cloak was tossed off the train. We couldn't leave it there, it was a health and safety hazard just lying in the corridor. Why, anyone could have tripped over it and hurt themselves."

The laughter had now spread to some of the staff, all except Remus. The marauder knew exactly what Harry was now up to and was poised ready to spring to their aid if he was needed.

Dolores was furious at the ridicule she was receiving from this little half-blood upstart. All pretence at being nice disappeared as she attempted to quieten the hall. "Silence! I'm glad you find this amusing Potter, we'll see if it's still as funny when you're sitting inside a ministry cell."

"That's Lord Potter to you and your latest attempt to arrest me is even more amateurish than your last. Your own ministry classes dementors as the darkest of creatures, the only advice given on defending yourself against the threat they pose is to run away. Please tell me how we were supposed to follow that advice when we were sitting on a train?"

Harry really wasn't paying attention to Umbridge anymore, he just continued talking to mask what Neville was doing behind him.

"You claim that creature worked for you yet it carried no ministerial identification. These wizards with you this morning are clearly aurors, they have the robes and all will carry badges that identify them as such. The dementor never identified itself nor told anyone what it was doing on board the express, can they even speak?"

Harry didn't know the answer to that last bit but just threw it in there anyway. "The ministry ordered at least one of those things onto a train full of children, with no supervision and no prior warning of what its intentions were. Whoever gave that order should be the one facing criminal charges today, not the people who defended themselves."

This led to a lot of cheering in agreement with those words but Harry would later not be able to remember what he said. He was now watching Neville feed Scabbers a very special titbit.

The rat had his head sticking out of Ron's pocket and appeared to be taking great interest in this morning's proceedings. It quickly accepted the piece of cheese from the boy sitting next to Ron. Peter had no way of knowing this piece of cheese had been left to soak in a special potion Remus and Sirius had prepared in France. The potion had been developed to force a stuck animagus back into their human form, it was apparently a lot less painful and stressful than the spell that performed the same function. Peter Pettigrew certainly wouldn't agree with that.

Ron felt a sudden weight at his side while the pocket ripped off his brand new Hogwarts robes. The small, pudgy, balding man now sitting between him and Neville was a total shock to him. He only managed a 'What the...' when there were stunners flying all around him.

Neville, Hermione and Harry all hit Peter with stunners as the six aurors now had their wands drawn, searching for the threat.

Minerva McGonagall had been handing out the Gryffindor timetables when Umbridge arrived and had slowly made her way toward Harry as he was speaking. There was no way this bitch was taking any of her lion cubs away for defending themselves. Her hand flew to her mouth in shock when she spied her former, and supposedly deceased, pupil sitting back amongst her students at the Gryffindor table. The same hand then sped for her wand and Minerva soon had him bound in ropes.

"That's Peter Pettigrew!"

Umbridge made a vain attempt to regain control of a situation she'd lost the moment they entered the hall. "Impossible McGonagall, Pettigrew's dead. Black killed him."

Harry may have been having fun in his earlier verbal battle with this bitch, now he was deadly serious. "And just how do you know that? Sirius Black was never even questioned about what happened that day, far less given a trial. Thrown in Azkaban and left to rot, now condemned to a dementor's kiss while the guilty party was awarded an order of Merlin. Will the ministry take the medal back now Pettigrew's alive?"

Minerva backed Harry to the hilt. "I was Peter Pettigrew's head of house and Transfiguration teacher for seven years. I can assure you, that IS indeed him lying there."

Dolores thought was more interested in what Potter had just said, the head of the DMLE was sure she had the brat now. "Just how do you know that? Sirius Black is a wanted criminal, as is anyone withholding information on his whereabouts."

"Go ahead and try to arrest me, third time might be the charm? Sirius Black is actually my godfather."

This drew gasps of astonishment from a lot of the people inside the hall.

"He made contact with me while I was holidaying in Europe and told me everything. I'm sure he's not in Britain at the moment, and no country will deport him here after learning he was never tried for the crimes he spent twelve years in Azkaban for. Now, that same ministry have ordered him to be administered the dementor's kiss on sight?"

They had rehearsed the way to play this many times while in France. Umbridge might be an unexpected complication, but it was worth it to have her here as a witness.

"Headmistress, this man was heavily involved in an attempt to end the Potter line. As Lord Potter, I claim the right to question him under truth serum and in front of witnesses. Since we're all already here, right now works for me?"

Andi Tonks was struggling to believe everything she was hearing, she'd always wondered what motive Sirius would have for betraying a man he thought of as a brother. She gave a little yelp of surprise as something was placed in her lap, hidden by the table. She glanced at Remus sitting beside her before studying the vial of clear liquid he'd obviously just passed her.

"Just in case you don't have any handy at the moment, Sirius sends his love."

That was all Andi needed to hear, with a wide smile on her face she interrupted the discussion. "Headmistress, I have some veritaserum here."

Dolores found herself helpless to intervene where a noble house line issue was concerned, Harry though was keen to involve the DMLE in the interrogation.

"Madam Umbridge, could one of your aurors please take official notes on Pettigrew's testimony?"

She could only nod as one of them quickly volunteered for the task, removing writing materials from a pocket that was obviously expanded on the inside.

McGonagall levitated the bound and still stunned Pettigrew to the front of the hall, within moments he was trussed up on a chair. One of the aurors came forward and searched Pettigrew, removing his wand.

Harry knew the potion on that cheese would prevent Pettigrew transforming for half an hour or so, plenty of time to get this done.

Amelia was always going to allow the questioning. The headmistress collected the veritaserum from Andi, reviving Pettigrew before administering the serum. She watched carefully as his eyes took on a glazed appearance before signalling to Harry it was time to begin. The entire hall was silent as everyone strained to hear what was about to unfold.

Harry was comforted by the fact both Hermione and Remus had made their way over to be by his side, it was time to get some answers as to why his parents died that Halloween.

In a clear voice, Harry began. "What is your name?"

"Peter Pettigrew." The answer may have been emotionless but it certainly generated a few emotions inside the hall.

"Are you a death eater?"

"Yes"

"Who was the Potter secret keeper?"

"I was."

"Why did everyone think it was Sirius who was the secret keeper?"

"To keep suspicion away from me."

"Who killed all those muggles in that street?"

"I did."

With that, Pettigrew had cleared Sirius of any wrongdoing but Harry wanted more. "Why did you cut off part of your finger?"

"To blame Black for my crimes."

Remus was actually growling at the traitor, Hermione had to stand in front of the marauder in case he attacked the rat.

"How did you escape from Sirius?"

"I blew a hole in the street and changed into my animagus form."

"What is your animagus form?"

"A rat."

Harry could clearly hear Ron parting with his breakfast behind him, he had to ignore his friend's discomfort for the moment. There was one question Harry needed to know the answer to. "Why did you betray my mum and dad?"

"The dark lord is very powerful. To disobey him meant a slow and painful death."

"I don't call spending eleven years as a rat much of a life?" Harry had meant it as a rhetorical question but Pettigrew was still under the chemical effects of the truth serum and was compelled to answer.

"It was better than being Sirius Black and stuck in Azkaban."

Hermione found herself having to get in front of both Harry and Remus at that point. Thankfully, Amelia took over proceedings.

"Madam Umbridge, you came here today with the intention of making a high-profile arrest. That opportunity is now sitting bound right in front of you. A supposedly deceased Order of Merlin winner who's actually a live murdering death eater."

Hermione had settled Harry enough that he was able to continue with the reason for today's theatricals. "I think we've just proved beyond any doubt that my godfather is an innocent man. I want to see Sirius Black's name cleared and the manhunt called off. Hundreds of witnesses just heard the facts from the murderer who betrayed my parents."

Dolores was running through scenarios in her head, trying to predict the public's response to whatever action she took. Admitting they were wrong about Black would harm the ministry, of that there was no doubt. Having the man who fooled them all in custody, complete with a full confession, would go a very long way to curbing the bad publicity. They finally had the Potter's betrayer and everyone liked a good twist to a story. The clincher though was staring Dolores in the face. The whole of Hogwarts had heard the confession, the chances of containing this were nil.

"We'll take responsibility of Pettigrew from here. Lord Potter, I can see no other recourse than to declare Sirius Black an innocent wizard. That will be done today."

With her head up, Dolores Umbridge led her aurors and their prisoner from the great hall of Hogwarts. It may not have been the prisoner she intended to arrest this morning but they were being cheered as they left the hall, she would settle for that.

Peter was now free of the truth serum's effects and broke away from his guards for a second to beg Percy Weasley for help. "I was a good pet to you, please don't let them take me away like this."

Percy knocked the grasping hands away before slugging Pettigrew on the jaw. Peter landed on the Gryffindor table with forgotten breakfast's going everywhere before the aurors once more had a hold of him. Percy stood there, fists clenched and ready for action, as everyone saw a different side to the studious and fastidious Gryffindor head boy. Penelope Clearwater certainly liked what she was seeing.

Hermione was wrapped around Harry while Remus was thumping him on the back in congratulations. They were soon joined by the rest of their friends.

Harry had his apology ready for an ashen-faced Ron. "Sorry we had to keep you in the dark there mate, you'd never have been able to act naturally around the rat if you'd known what he was."

Neville immediately backed Harry up. "I don't think either Harry or I slept a wink last night, knowing who we were sharing a dorm with."

Luna came up and cuddled into her boyfriend's side. She was probably more worried about Ron's reaction than Harry was.

Ron's first question was well thought out, though perhaps not worded best for being in the middle of the great hall. "Why didn't you let Crookshanks eat the bastard on the train?"

Hermione had no intention of chiding her friend for his language today, she thought he was handling the news rather well. "It wasn't about revenge Ron, we were more focused on getting Sirius declared a free man."

Harry was nodding in agreement. "Otherwise we would have told you at once and captured him first chance we got. It had to be done somewhere so public, the ministry couldn't sweep it under the carpet."

All Luna's old insecurities had resurfaced while she clung to Ron and practically begged for his forgiveness. "I'm really sorry for not

telling you Ron, I hope you can understand why I did it and not be angry with me?"

Ron pulled his girlfriend into a tight hug. "We'll kiss and make up later love. Knowing that man was in my pocket saw me lose my breakfast, I need to brush my teeth before we get to that."

Luna now had a wide smile on her face as she kissed his cheek. "Looking forward to it."

Ginny also instantly forgave their friends, knowing they were right. Neither she nor Ron could have acted normally around Scabbers if they had known who he really was. All it would have taken was one verbal slip-up and the rat would have run.

Amelia and Minerva quickly decided to start the day on second period, due to the time taken over this morning's activities. The headmistress was about to announce this when there was an almighty dong that reverberated in every corner of the castle. Every door and window flew open and resisted all efforts to close them. Minerva knew what this was but she had trouble believing it.

"Amelia, every ward in the school has just fallen. What could have caused that?"

The headmistress shook her head nonplussed. "I have no idea, the Hogwarts wards have stood for a millennium..." Amelia stopped talking as both witches noticed that their breath was now visible. The rapid drop in temperature signalled that they had a far more pressing problem to deal with than why the wards failed.

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Albus had trouble believing his eyes, or his luck as he recognised the prisoner Dolores and her aurors were escorting out of Hogwarts. The prisoner was understandably older and certainly looking the worse for wear but Albus couldn't help but identify the terrified wizard as Peter Pettigrew. That Peter was alive and under arrest told Albus everything he needed to know, how he pulled it off and why Pettigrew was inside Hogwarts was immaterial to Dumbledore.

Fate had just handed him the missing ingredient in his scheme, a genuine bad guy to take the blame. Albus sprang into action, he had

the group disarmed and on the ground before they even knew what hit them.

His next stage of the plan saw him release the spells that hid the Hogwarts ward stone he'd previously uncovered. It had taken him almost two days to remove all the protection charms that had been placed there specifically to prevent him from doing what he was about to. Using the wand he received on his eleventh birthday, Albus cast the most powerful blasting curse he could at the now exposed ward stone.

Albus was well aware the Dementors would be here in mere moments and hoped the veritable feast he was providing them here would be enough to induce a feeding frenzy. He didn't think they would be able to resist the sheer volume of unprotected young souls readily available inside the castle.

Before making his escape, Albus wanted to make the tableau that others would find appear a bit more convincing. A quick enverate and Albus had an audience of one. He wanted someone to know the brilliance of his scheme, especially as that someone wouldn't tell a soul about it. Peter soon wouldn't have one.

"Hello Peter, I have to say you've looked better."

"Oh Albus, thank Merlin it's you. None of them would listen to me, you've got to help me."

"Actually Peter, I don't. I only woke you so you could attempt to run away, make it appear more authentic when the ministry eventually investigates. I want it to appear as if you fought a battle with the aurors that accidentally brought the wards down. Unfortunately, this allowed the Dementors to surprise you and everyone perished. I suggest you start running as the Dementors will soon be upon us."

Albus himself was almost caught out at how quickly the Dementors were upon them, he'd never seen the creatures so angry. He was forced to cast his patronus to protect himself, only to lose sight of Peter while doing so. How could the little shit disappear so quickly? Albus made certain he hadn't a wand before he revived him. He couldn't allow Peter to escape, he had seen and knew far too much.

Albus screamed in excruciating pain as he suddenly knew where Peter was, right behind him. Pettigrew's left hand was now at his throat, it was the right one though that had just stabbed something sharp into his lower back. The old wizard was powerless to do anything with his wand other than maintain his patronus, the Dementors had now reached them and Dolores was experiencing what was probably her first kiss.

Peter was enjoying his moment of triumph and spoke into Albus' ear from behind. "I spent the last eleven years hiding from everyone, I don't need you searching for me too."

Albus could feel his power slipping away as his blood leaked onto the grass, he tried to reason with his attacker. "If my patronus fails, we both get our souls sucked. You've got to stop this Peter."

"Actually Albus, I don't" As if to prove his point, Peter pulled out the knife and stabbed it back into Dumbledore.

He waited the screaming stopped before speaking again. "The great Albus Dumbledore, brought to his knees by a knife I nicked off the Gryffindor table. I always was the best thief amongst the Marauders. Unlike you, I also have a way out of here. Goodbye old man."

Peter stabbed Dumbledore a couple of times more until his patronus gave out. As Albus lay dying on the grass, the last thing he saw before the Dementors closed in was a rat scurrying away in the direction of the forbidden forest.

The self-proclaimed leader of the light had come to a very dark end.

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Amelia was used to making decisions under pressure but the magnitude of this one dwarfed everything she'd ever done. The wards were down and the dementors were coming for them, she literally had seconds to devise a way that everyone in the hall wouldn't have their soul sucked. With the wards gone, apparition should now be possible. Experience had taught her though that most witches and wizards couldn't apparate while under a dementor attack, and most of the school couldn't do it anyway.

What they needed was somewhere big enough for everyone to be safely contained in yet easily defendable. "Everyone who can cast a patronus, do so now! Harry, can you still open the chamber of secrets?"

With the lad's cry of 'yes', Amelia's decision was made.

There were soon silver animals whizzing around the hall, providing relief for the moment. There weren't nearly enough of them though to provide protection against any sustained attack by the number of dementors present. They really needed to get to a location where there was at most only one way in or out, then hope help would arrive. The measure she was about to order could be considered rash but Amelia felt sitting here and hoping for the best would see most of them into an early grave.

"Remus, I need you, Harry and Hermione to get to that bathroom and have the entrance open for us arriving. We'll be following on right behind you."

Prongs had been standing guarding the doors to the great hall. The first few dementors that had tried to force their way passed were now empty cloaks, lying in the entrance hall. The trio were soon behind the stag, a silver otter and wolf guarding their backs.

When the dementors saw that it was only this small group who were leaving, they parted like the Red Sea and granted them safe passage. There were plenty more souls still in the hall and only one golden stag.

They raced for Myrtle's bathroom and Harry wasted no time in hissing at the sink. When the goblins had been here during the summer, they had used a portable stair system to get up and down the tube. Harry was pleased to see they had taken it with them when they were finished. Sliding down the massive tube would get everyone down there much quicker, and today quicker could save lives.

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The rat watched as the dementors swarmed toward the castle after removing the souls of those victims left laying on the grass. Peter was hoping the castle would be wiped out, leaving him in the clear.

The death eater had felt the potion that was in the cheese wear off and had been looking for an opportunity to once more change into his rat form. It was hard to believe that Albus Dumbledore had been the one to provide it, Peter had now gotten himself out from under two dark lords and counted himself mighty lucky to have survived. He was so concerned about his safety, Peter forgot that the outside world could be a dangerous place for a rat.

Vengeance swooped in silently on white wings and the animagus didn't even know what hit him. Hedwig's talons had Peter in the air and his back broken before the animagus could possibly think about reacting.

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Amelia had the entire school population bunched up as tight as possible. Minerva was at the front, with Arthur, Ron, Ginny and Luna, it was hoped their combined patronuses would be enough to push their way through the corridors. The first years were bunched up behind them, with the prefects there to keep the eleven year olds moving. Other staff who could cast the charm were sprinkled about the mass of the remaining students with Amelia, Susan, Neville and Hannah to cover their rear. The headmistress hated having to use the children in this matter but had no other option, all their lives were at stake here.

The dementors were becoming more frantic as the large group of souls was continually being denied them. As they made their way along the corridors, their group was subject to attack after attack. The dark creatures then changed tactics and now tried to grab terrified students out from the masses. Ron thought the golden stag and silver otter coming racing down the corridor to join the fight was one of the most beautiful sights he'd ever seen.

Prongs sent the dementors fleeing as the head of the large column of humanity turned the corner and spotted their salvation. Anyone who's ever held one in still would have no idea of the relief felt as they now raced for the toilet up ahead. Minerva didn't stop as she ran straight up and jumped down the tube. By the time the first student arrived mere seconds later, she had transfigured some pebbles into mattresses so they would have a softer landing than the head of Gryffindor had just experienced. Minerva thought if she

got out of this with nothing more than a bruised arse, that would be one hell of a victory.

As the students streamed down the chute, she was busy transfiguring torches and sticking them to the tunnel walls. The children were terrified and the last thing they needed was to be in a dark tunnel. As the first prefects arrived, Minerva had them herding their fellow students into groups. All eyes were still glued on the chute, as if they expected the dementors to follow them down here.

Back above, things were becoming quite desperate. The dementors could sense their prey escaping and now attacked with even more ferocity, the rear guard were bearing the brunt of it. Amelia was prouder than she could possibly say of the kids for facing this nightmare the way they were, but they were still kids. Susan and Hannah were almost out on their feet while Neville wasn't much better. Reinforcements arrived in the shape of three Weasleys and Luna, their combined patronuses momentarily relieving the pressure they were under.

"C'mon guys, why would you want to hang about here when there's a perfectly creepy chamber of secrets waiting on you around the corner?"

Hannah may be exhausted but she still had a joke left in her. "Ron, if that's your idea of a greeting, how did you ever land Luna as a girlfriend?" Her patronus failed as Hannah's concentration lapsed, a Dementor sensed its chance and took the opportunity presented. It had a hold of the now screaming girl and was trying to drag her away from her friends. The other Dementors also surged at this point, leaving the knackered defenders fighting for their own lives.

Hannah was struggling with every bit of strength she had left in her body but the Dementor was gaining the upper hand. It was leaning down to administer the kiss when suddenly it had a face full of silver otter. Hermione managed to hold it off Hannah until Prongs got there and used his antlers to rip the dementor's arm right off.

Hannah collapsed to the floor before Arthur raced forward and scooped the girl up into his arms, he led the mad dash back to the bathroom as Remus and Filius were seeing the last of the students into the chute. Arthur didn't stop but jumped right in with Hannah still in his arms, she had such a tight hold of him it would have wasted

far to much time trying to peel her off. Ginny and Lunna were right behind them.

Soon it was only Harry and Amelia who were left in the bathroom with Prongs standing at the doorway, barring entry to the hoard of Dementors who were still chasing.

"Amelia, you need to go so I can close this as I jump in."

"I can't do that and leave you alone here."

"Trust me when I say I'll be right behind you. Hermione will be going nuts down there, Remus had to practically throw her into the chute."

Amelia realised Harry was right, and that Susan would be doing the same waiting on her arriving. "You better be right behind me young man or I'll be taking those points back off you."

It wasn't much of a joke but both appreciated it wasn't too bad, considering the circumstances.

Amelia jumped and Harry hesitated only long enough to hiss 'close' in parseltongue at the sink, before jumping in as it closed above him. By the time Prongs faded from the door, the toilet was empty and nothing larger than a cockroach was getting into the chute.

Harry landed on something soft before something soft and yet immensely strong pounced on him, wrapping limbs around his body to ensure he wasn't going anywhere soon. He had just about gotten his betrothed calmed when the both of them were hit by another sobbing female, Hannah's mantra of 'thank you' between her sobs was getting embarrassing.

"Hannah, we didn't do anything you wouldn't have done for us. Who was one of the first to have her wand out at Beauxbatons?"

"Hermione's right as usual. We need to get up, get people out this tunnel and into the chamber."

Neville was the one who asked the obvious question. "You mean this isn't the chamber?"

"This is only the tunnel leading to the chamber. Its behind another massive door that only I can open. Once there, nothing will get through."

This saw spirits lift as Arthur led the group of friends forward so Harry could open the chamber. Hannah was holding onto Neville and Susan while Ginny found herself wedged between Ron and Luna. Arthur could now see what the Grangers had been talking about for himself. Yes he was there, but only in a supervisory capacity. This group were very tight and looked after each other. When he saw the massive door that Harry opened, Arthur was certain they would be safe once behind it. He headed back to help Amelia ferry the students along here.

Some of them gasped at finally seeing the inside of the fabled chamber but Ron had seen it all before, he had other things on his mind. "Some chocolate would certainly hit the spot right about now."

No sooner had he spoken than a small table with eight mugs of hot chocolate appeared in front of them.

Hermione was first to realise what was happening. "It must be the Hogwarts elves, they can now find this chamber."

"Hope they can provide enough for everyone, there are some people back there who could really use it."

The words were hardly out of Harry's mouth when they got to witness the magic of Hogwarts.

Amelia was catching up with Minerva on what their situation was. "We have about half a dozen broken bones, mainly ankles and wrists, caused by students clattering into one another when exiting the chute. About twenty twists and sprains and one head knock, nothing Poppy can't handle and they'll all be fine by tonight."

Arthur joined them and reported that the door was open. Prefects led their charges along the tunnel as the professors brought the injured along, when they arrived there was a real pleasant surprise waiting on them. The house tables were now in the chamber and they were laden with steaming mugs of hot chocolate. The elves were also whizzing around like dervishes and cleaning the chamber, probably for the first time since it was built. When the last person

was inside, Harry closed the door to a great cheer. Even the most terrified amongst them could see nothing would be coming through that door until Harry opened it.

Hermione approached the two women in charge. "Headmistress, Professor McGonagall, we were able to call for Dobby. He left with a message for Ragnok, telling him what happened here this morning. We trust the goblins to take action rather than the ministry, we've all met the head of the DMLE."

Amelia nodded in agreement. The hot chocolate was helping but the adrenalin come down was kicking in, she understood just how lucky they were today. Even with this bolt hole available, there would have been lives lost if not for that amazing patronus of Harry's. With the elves able to reach them, they could easily spend the day here. Her primary task was the care of these children but, with everyone safe for the moment, Amelia couldn't help but think how today's events would effect their world.

Anyone involved in placing the Dementors around Hogwarts saw their careers ended today, there would be no surviving the backlash from this. Amelia herself was going to have to survive the ire of the Grangers, she'd promised they would be safe yet both Harry and Hermione were in the thick of the action today. The parents were entitled to be raging, she was raging herself.

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Emma was using her hands to cover her eyes but that didn't really help, she could still hear the screaming. That some of those screams were coming from her husband, daughter and Sirius didn't help her at all, she was wishing with all her heart that the kids had never set foot back inside Hogwarts.

A mixture of cheers and groans coaxed the distraught parent to remove her hands, she really needed to know just what was going on. Harry shot passed in front of her, reaching speeds that should be illegal for someone of his age. When she'd seen him go into that dive, Emma was sure her boy was going to be eating grass. Instead it had been a feint and the Slytherin seeker now had more green on his robes than when he started the game. Grass stains could be a bugger to get out too.

One glance at her husband, bedecked in Gryffindor colours, was enough to tell Emma he was having the time of his life. Hermione was a wonderful daughter but her sporting abilities would never be something to cheer for. She well remembered a seven year old version's quip after a less than stellar performance at her school sports day. 'I'm Hermione Granger, built to read - not run!'

Dan loved his sport and it wasn't really considered proper etiquette to scream and cheer at a children's spelling bee. Here he was able to give full vent to those urges, Dan was doing just that and really didn't need the encouragement that Sirius was providing.

Her gaze switched to her daughter, only to see a myriad of emotions displayed there. Worry, pride, excitement and concern were all there but when Hermione was watching Harry, the dominant emotion would always be love. Their friends were also really into the game, Ron and Ginny had two brothers up there on brooms as well.

Emma was struggling with watching her boy fly around like a lunatic while others whacked cannon balls at him. She needed to take her thoughts off what was happening in front of her so cast her mind back to how they came to be sitting at the Gryffindor - Slytherin quidditch match.

They had all known what the plan was for dealing with Pettigrew. Only the fact that it would be very public, and Remus swore he would be there, saw parents and godfather agreeing to the scheme. So when Dobby was called for, they weren't too surprised. When the little guy didn't quickly return with the expected good news, that was when they began to worry. On finally hearing just what happened, all three wanted to get to Scotland as quickly as possible, only for Dobby to tell them no.

"Master Harry ordered me not to bring you to Hogwarts, or help you get there. Master Harry says they are perfectly safe and the Hogwarts elves are taking good care of everyone and it's very dangerous for anyone outside and mistress worried for you too. Master Harry also said godfather need to wait on official word of being free."

After later hearing what had actually happened, Emma was forced to agree that 'Master Harry' was right. The Dementors had been thwarted inside Hogwarts, an action that saw even more of their

number killed. This had never happened before and they wanted revenge, the dementors went on the rampage.

The residents of Hogsmead appeared to be about to bear the brunt of their ire as the Dementors descended on the magical village. The residents' screams of terror changed to shouts of confusion and hope as fifty goblin warriors in full battle gear ported into the centre of the village.

The goblins as a species are unaffected by the Dementors debilitating mental attacks, and they also knew how to dispose of their other deadly threat. It was extremely difficult for a dementor to administer anyone a kiss when a goblin blade was protruding from its skull. The goblins always forged their blades with a trace of mithril added to the steel, this had an effect on the dark creatures that was considerably worse than silver to a werewolf.

The battle was brutal, swift and totally one sided, to the soundtrack of roaring cheers of encouragement by the occupants of an entire village. The goblins slaughtered every last Dementor.

Ragnok hadn't paused to accept the adulation of the grateful Hogsmead residents, instead pushed on to Hogwarts. They rapidly proceeded to the correct toilet and used the memory sphere Harry had provided at the start of summer. When they gained access to the chamber and inform everyone it was now safe to return to the surface, the goblin rescuers were met by their second round of wizards and witches cheering them.

All the children had to be sent back home as Hogwarts was wide open until a new ward scheme could be erected. With the ministry thrown into total disarray, Harry and Amelia took it upon themselves to negotiate with Ragnok for the goblins to ward the castle. That Potter gold was used to protect Hogwarts was money well spent as far as Harry was concerned. Ragnok was so delighted at the amazingly good press the goblin nation was receiving, he gave Harry the lowest price he possibly could.

The press rather predictably went crazy over Harry's involvement, pointing out that he had saved Hogwarts before contacting the goblins who then saved Hogsmead. Harry and his friends missed most of the post Dementor debacle since they all headed off to France until the dust settled.

Dead Dumbledore, Dolores and the aurors made little sense until an equally dead Peter Pettigrew was also found, lying mangled on the owlery floor. The notes carried by the auror were still considered to be the official transcript of the Pettigrew questioning carried out inside Hogwarts. Sirius was not only free, he could have been elected minister if Harry Potter said that's what he wanted to happen.

The ministry was in utter meltdown as anyone associated with Fudge resigned before the angry mob could turn up at the door. The people had trusted Fudge and Dumbledore, both had been shown to be severely undeserving of that trust. The only figure who they now trusted was one who had apparently left the country, not something that sat well with the British wizarding public.

Approaches were made to entice Amelia away from Hogwarts to be minister, that was until she let it be known that particular move might see Harry Potter leave the school. The headmistress was positive that wouldn't be the case, but it certainly ensured her name was no longer associated with a job she now didn't want.

She had worked at the ministry since starting auror academy at the age of eighteen, yet Amelia felt she had achieved more for the wizarding community in her very short tenure as Headmistress of Hogwarts than all those years spent at the ministry. Amelia swore she would resist any and all efforts to remove her from the headmistress' job, at least until Susan left Hogwarts.

The new minister was apparently here today. Hardly surprising though since most of wizarding Britain appeared to be here today. Amelia wanted to show that Hogwarts was back in business, and better than ever. She'd thrown the castle open to all the parents who wanted to attend the first Quidditch match of the season. With Harry Potter playing seeker for Gryffindor, the place was jam packed.

Both Grangers and Sirius had supported Amelia's decision, but they had also expressed their views that this wouldn't turn into a public relations circus. Harry would be meeting with neither minister nor press, he would play and then enjoy the after match festivities with his friends. Amelia had given her word. In magical Britain at the moment, whatever Harry Potter wanted was not something to be opposed.

Emma shuddered once more as she watched Harry dive again, she could see from Hermione's excitement that this dive was different. He pulled up but this time he had a golden ball in his hands and the stands went nuts. Remus had given up all pretence of being impartial as he, Dad and Sirius jumped up and down with excitement at the win.

Emma couldn't help but think that, like the snitch, Harry could hold the wizarding world in the palm of his hands. Like everyone else, she was watching as he was congratulated by his teammates before flying up to Hermione and presenting her with the snitch and a kiss. She also couldn't help but think this was typical of the young man she'd rapidly come to think of as her son. His only interest in having the world in the palm of his hand would be to present it to Hermione.

No one could predict what the future would hold but Emma could only see her family going from strength to strength. She was also sure their family would be getting larger, but not for a good few years yet.

The End

Thanks for reading.